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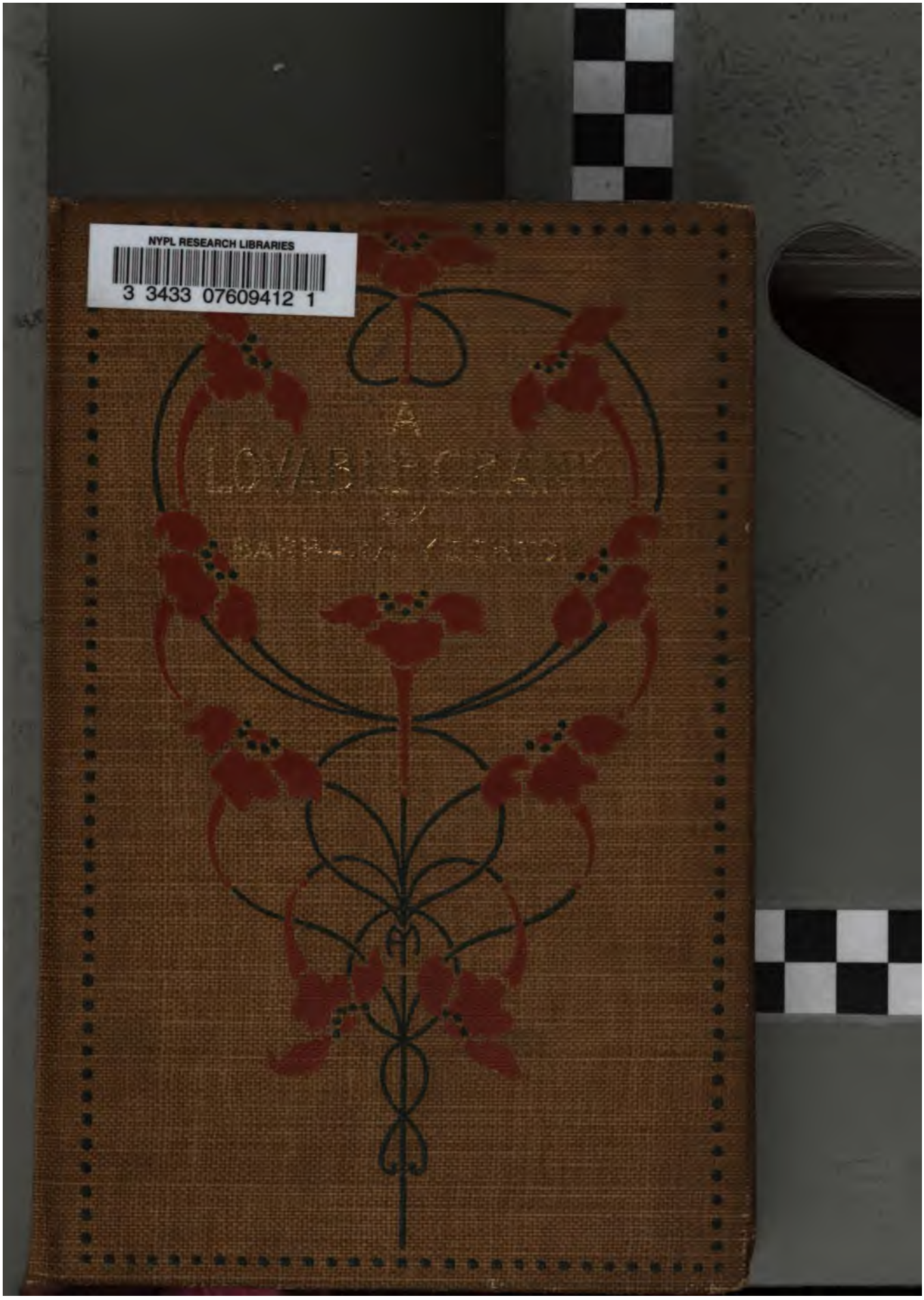
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A LOVABLE CRANK





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"'Here I am, Papa,' she said."



A LOVABLE CRANK

OR

MORE LEAVES FROM THE ROSES

BY

BARBARA YECHTON pseud of

AUTHOR OF

"WE TEN; OR, THE STORY OF THE ROSES;" "DERICK;" "LITTLE SAINT HILARY;" "INGLESIDE;" "TWO KNIGHTS-ERRANT;" "A MATTER OF HONOR;" "TOINETTE;" "SCARAMOUCHE;" "A LITTLE TURNING ASIDE"

Lydia Farrington Krause

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TO

My Dear Ones

IN LOVING ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNSEL
AND ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN ME
WITHOUT STINT

25X484

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A Lovable Crank;

Or

More Leaves from the Roses.

I.

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW.

TOLD BY JACK.

BETTY was in quite a flutter that afternoon; in fact, to tell the truth, we were all more or less in a flutter, — that is a favourite word of Nurse's; she says it means a condition "when you 're kind of upset in your mind so you can't settle down to nothing steady." And that was just the way we had all been that day. Betty admitted it, — Betty is nothing if not honest, — but Nora tossed her head, and said it would take more than merely a young girl coming to the house for a visit to agitate *her*. Of course she would n't say "flutter," — that was entirely too ordinary a word; Nonie prides herself on speaking good English.

But when Phil pulled out his watch and declared that he would feel her pulse, and so settle the question as to her "agitation" to the satisfaction of all parties present, she put her hands behind her back and looked, as Judge would say, very haughty. Judge is a devourer of books, magazines, papers, — anything that he can lay his hands on, — and sometimes he throws us into fits of laughter

with his droll remarks, drawled out in such funny, stilted language.

The reason for the unusual excitement in the family was this: Alice Endicott, a young girl friend of Betty's, — the one she met at Endicott Beach when she visited the Ervengs several years ago, — was expected to arrive that day, to spend a long time, perhaps a year, with us. Nora spoke of it as a visit, but it was n't really that, — though papa would have preferred it so, — for the Endicotts pay Alice's expenses while she is with us. It came about in this way: Mr. Endicott is in very delicate health, and he was ordered to Germany for a certain kind of treatment. Of course, Mrs. Endicott would go with him, but they did n't wish to take Alice along, for some reason or other; and as Mrs. Erveng (she 's Mr. Endicott's sister) was in California, — she and Hilliard have been there for the last two years on account of her health, — they were in rather a quandary what to do with Alice while they were away. All this Alice wrote to Betty, — though they have n't met again, they 've corresponded, off and on, ever since that summer at the Beach; and after talking it over with Nannie and Miss Marston, and getting papa's consent, Betty sent a warm and urgent invitation to Alice to come and spend the year with us.

Well, it seems Alice was delighted with the idea, said she had always wanted to know the entire Rose family, and would be only too happy to have this opportunity of becoming acquainted with them, etc.; Betty read the letter aloud to us in the school-room. Then Mr. and Mrs. Endicott came on from Boston to talk to papa about it, and after a lot of discussion, — they offering, papa refusing, — and no end of letters from the Ervengs urging papa to agree to the plan, the *pater* gave in, and it was settled that Alice should come to New York and live with us for a year, or until her parents returned to America.

Betty hurrahed when she heard the final decision, and nearly danced me off my feet in a mad whirl around the room. Betty has improved very much in her behaviour; she does n't slide down the banisters any more, nor hang on the doors as she used to. Nora declares that that month at Endicott Beach, right under Mrs. Erveng's eyes, was what made her change, but I don't. *I* think it 's all due to Nannie's influence, — Nannie is such a splendid girl! and I know Betty thinks an awful lot of her. Betty is still quick-tempered, and she *loves* to tease, and very often she quite startles a person by the rapid way she changes her mind and flies from one subject to another — sometimes I don't know *what* to make of her. Still, she 's awfully good company; and if you 're in a scrape, she 'll see you through every time, no matter how much trouble it puts her to; very likely she 'll give you a blowing up, — Betty loves to speak her mind out! — but once over, you 'll never hear of it again. Nora says she 's just full of whims and freaks, and I guess she is; but, except once in a while, they don't bother me much.

I did n't mind Alice's coming; of course I had n't met her, so I did n't really know what kind of a girl she was, but I took Betty's word for it that she was nice. But all the members of the family did not share Betty's joy. Felix, for one, was not happy over it, — he is not fond of meeting strangers, — and I fancy that Nonie did n't care very much to have Alice with us, either.

Fee's health is better than when I last told you about him; Dr. Archard and Dr. Gordon both think he is getting over that awful attack in a most remarkable manner, but of course he is still very delicate, and they say that he will be very lame to the end of his life. Poor old Fee! He would n't allow anybody to pity him, though, I can tell you. No matter how he feels, you rarely hear anything about it from him, — I mean in complaint. Sometimes,

when he 's in pain, he gets awfully cranky and says sharp things; but there is no grumble, no whine, in it. Felix is plucky through and *through.* When I get discouraged over my Greek and Latin, — I wish to goodness those old languages were literally dead! — I look at Fee and think of the immense amount of work he has done, is doing, and intends to do, spite of all he has to contend with, and I feel perfectly ashamed of myself; then I tackle my bugbears again.

It took a long time for Fee to rally from that shock to his back. *Very* slowly the use of his legs returned; but at last, one glad, blessed day he was able to stand on his feet, and then to walk with the aid of crutches. You should have seen Phil that day; he was almost wild with delight.

After a while Fee was able to discard one of the crutches, and now most of the time he manages to get around with one crutch and his cane; still, there are "bad days" when both crutches have to be used. He does n't like these times to be noticed, so we never make any remarks, only just try to arrange things as easy for him as possible without his knowing it; for Fee hates to be helped, now that he is once more "a perpendicular," as he expresses it. "I 've given trouble and bother enough to you all," he says; "and now that I 've got two legs of my own again, I am going to use 'em." And he does. I 'm positive that often he forces himself to do things that are far beyond his strength, — though he won't admit it, — he 's got such a tremendous will.

What do you suppose Felix has been doing all this time, besides getting better? Just as soon as the doctor would let him, while he was still flat on his back, unable to move his foot and barely able to lift a hand, he got Nannie and Phil to help him lay out a course of study for himself, to agree with the college curriculum, and started in on it!

Well, the way he worked fairly startled everybody, — as Phil says, "he just got over those difficult studies as if they

were child's play." As he could n't go to college, aunt Lindsay gave him a tutor at home, and he — Mr. Withers — told papa that he had never known any one learn as Felix did. Papa and the doctor were afraid he might harm himself with such close application, but he did n't. In fact, some of us think that the unexpected improvement in his health (for it seems that Dr. Gordon thought Fee would never walk again) was a good deal due to that very study; you see he went at it in such a desperate fashion that he had no time to brood over what he calls his "uselessness;" and of course that was all the better for him. Nannie and I suspect that he did it on purpose, so he should n't have a chance to think.

Well, Fee got along so famously — putting three years' work easily into two — that Mr. Withers proposed he should go up for examination to enter college for the last year of the course, and so be graduated with Phil. Papa gave his consent, so did the Faculty, and Fee was as happy as a lark at the prospect of getting to college after all.

By that time he was just beginning to crawl about on crutches; only a few steps each day, mind you — but you need n't think he let that keep him back. One fine day, just as soon as ever he could stand the exertion, he and Mr. Withers quietly started out for the college; and the first we knew of the matter was when it was all over, — when Phil and Felix came into the school-room where we all were, and Phil announced that Fee had passed his exam., and was then a senior of Columbia!

Well, if you had heard the cheers that went up, — "three times three and a tiger!" were nothing to it. The girls joined in, even prim Nora; and Betty jumped up on a chair and waved Paul's American flag with every hurrah she gave, — I tell you we nearly "raised the roof." In the midst of all the commotion in walked papa, — he 'd been out when the boys came home, — and when he heard the

news I think he was really quite overcome for a moment — papa does n't often show his feelings, you know — and when he spoke his voice was unsteady. "I know the extreme difficulty of this examination," he said. "You have done well, my son. Your — mother — would have been — very proud of you!"

"I promised her — " began Fee; then *his* voice failed, and he and papa gripped hands, and stood there without a word, their eyes fairly shining at each other through their glasses.

We could all see that papa was awfully proud of Fee; and as for Phil — well, I really think he would have liked to go out in the streets and tell everybody he met what Fee had done.

But after the excitement was all over, Felix collapsed, and for a while he could n't even hold his head up. Nannie and Phil had to wait on him and lift him about as they used to do when he was first taken ill. He was up again, though, before we any of us expected it, and ready to start in on his studies. And what is more, in the whole term he never missed but twice in his attendance, — once when his back ached so badly that he *had* to give in; and the other time when the day was so terribly stormy, the walking so very slippery, that Phil and we all scolded and urged and advised until we got him to stay at home. Looking back, I don't see how such a delicate lame fellow as Fee *ever* got through all that work and exertion. I 'm sure that most of the time he was n't fit to do it, — he 'd get that strained, haggard look in his face, and great black circles under his eyes. But you would never hear him complain, and he always turned the subject if you asked him about himself. Fee 's got a tremendous lot of pluck in that frail body of his! I 'm convinced 't was his nerve and his indomitable will that carried him through.

When I talked to him one day about working at that desperate pace — I 'd found him lying on his bed, looking

all used up — he let himself out a little. "You are only wasting your breath, Rosebud," he said resolutely. "I have set myself certain tasks and, God helping me, I 'm *going to do them*. And you know nothing that 's worth having is won without some labour. Is n't it your favourite, Walter Scott, that says 'Labour is absolutely the charter by which we hold existence'? Why, then, should n't I take my share as well as the rest of you? See here, Jack," he suddenly raised himself on his elbow, and looked squarely at me, "with this miserable old body of mine I 've no right to expect a long life, — in fact, I 've every right to expect a short life, — and to accomplish what I want before I die, I 've *got* to get into each year more than most fellows do. See? I want to amount to something, Jack," — there was a ring in his voice that stirred me, — "I want to make a place for myself among men — to feel that I am of *actual use* in the world. Then, when my last account has to be rendered, perhaps there 'll be a little more to offer for my existence than grumblings and vain rebellion." He threw himself back. "Now that I 've trusted you with my object, Jack," he went on in his usual voice, "don't preach to me any more about 'working hard.' Infinitely better to wear out quickly in a good cause than to rust out slowly in uselessness. Now go get me some extra pillows from your room and stick them at my back, like a good boy, so I can sit up comfortably. Then give me that 'Phædo' on the table."

I stopped a moment at the foot of his bed. "I wish I could help you, Fee," I said; "I *wish* I could! There might be things I could do for you if you 'd only let me try."

A sweet little smile touched Fee's lips. "I know you would, Jackie," he said warmly. "You all love me a great deal more than I deserve. And as for helping — why, I can't *begin* to tell you the good it does me to know you people are so deeply interested, and have such faith that I 'll succeed. That really keeps my courage up."

Then I started off to get the pillows.

So that last year the boys went to college together. Phil was awfully good to Felix, — patient, and so tender in helping him that Fee declared he was handled as if he were a



"In his cap and gown."

piece of glass or rare china, — and then they graduated together. Phil barely got through; but Felix came off with flying colours, his B.A. and Final Honours, besides winning a prize in money. There was such a fuss made over Felix

that some people thought Phil must feel badly about it. But indeed he did n't! He was just as happy as a sandboy. What Fee says is true, — "There is n't a mean bone in Phil's body." "Happy?" he replied, when some one spoke to him about it. "Well, I should say so! With all those abominable studies off my mind, and a member of the family covering himself with glory, — who would n't be?"

Well, that fall, when we came back from the Cottage, Phil got a position down town — papa did n't object; I guess he agrees now with what Phil says of himself, that he 's cut out for business, not a profession — and Felix entered the Law School.

He did just as well there as he had at college. President White told papa that Fee was one of the most brilliant and promising young lawyers the school had ever graduated. Of course we all attended the Commencement, even Miss Marston and the younger ones, — Paul and Mädel and Alan, — and you never saw a prouder set of people than we were when Fee came along in his cap and gown, leaning on Phil's arm and carrying his "sheepskin." He sat down by papa, and papa turned and peered at him in such a funny, surprised way — almost as if he 'd never seen Fee before — that Betty began to giggle, and that started the younger ones off.

After that Felix passed his exam. for the bar, and then went into Max Derwent's office, where he is now. He has n't been there very long, and though, of course, he can't do the outside work, running to the courts and all that, still Max says he is getting on finely, that he finds Fee very useful, and that one of these days, pretty soon, he is going to give him a case to plead in court.

Max told Felix that he need n't come to the office the days he did n't feel just up to the mark, and Fee said, "All right;" but he has hardly missed a day — even Nannie can't get him to stay at home, unless he is too miserable to hold his head

up. I fancy he feels about this as he did about his studies, — that he must make the very most of every minute.

Still I don't see how he could ever manage the travelling to and from the office were not Phil always with him. They go up and down town at the same hour, and always lunch together. Phil is so big and strong that Felix never gets nervous while he is with him, even in a crowd, and Phil takes the greatest care of Fee, in such a natural, matter-of-fact sort of way that it is only once in a while we realise what a constant responsibility it must be to him. But I think Fee knows — I think he loves Phil *dearly*.

Now and then people — acquaintances — will comment, "How devoted those brothers are to each other!" and sometimes, when Nurse meets Phil running up to the school-room with Felix in his arms, she holds up her hands and says, "Well, now! ain't it truly *beautiful* to see how them two b'ys loves each other?" And so they do. Phil thinks there never was such a clever fellow in the world before as Felix, and Fee regards Phil as a miracle of manly strength and beauty. But of course they don't go round telling each other so, and making a fuss over it. Very often they don't hold the same opinion about things, and then sometimes they get quite excited over it. But the squall soon blows over, and, as we 've found out, woe to the person that attempts to interfere between them at such times, — they both snub him terrifically, and then off they go together as smiling and amiable as if they 'd never fallen out!

The other day I heard somebody say to Nora, — you might know 't was Chad Whitcombe, — "What a wonderful person you all make out Felix to be, — a regular none-such!" I was so mad! For Fee is n't perfect, by any means; he does get the queerest notions into his head sometimes, and you can't budge 'em. Then he can be very trying when he does n't feel well, — so irritable and disagreeable, and sarcastic, too, if his feelings get hurt. Nora says he 's the crank of the

family, and he admits it; but Nannie always puts in quickly: "Yes, the crank on which the whole family turn, — our lovable crank." That 's what dear mamma used to call Fee, — her lovable crank. And somehow the name just suits him, for, with all his little peculiarities and sharpnesses and sarcastic speeches, there is n't one in the whole family that we all love as dearly as we do Felix. If any of us are in trouble, we 're sure to carry the whole thing to Fee for his advice, even if he pitches into us, as he quite often does; and if he is n't in our good times, why, we feel as if they did n't amount to much. As a rule, wherever Fee is — even in his sick-room — there you 'll find the family.

Max has been away a great deal since you last heard of us. First his mother got ill, and he had to go to the south of France with her; then they were no sooner back than a lawsuit came up about some property of Chad's — you know who I mean, Chadwick Whitcombe — in Australia; and what does Max do but travel away off there to see to it! Our boys thought that he should n't have gone; they said that, as Chad was of age and no longer his ward, Max should just have let Monsieur de Don*key* look after his own affairs. But it seems that Max is executor — or something, I 've forgotten what — for Chad's father's estate, so he considered 't was the right thing to go, and win the lawsuit if he could; though I heard him tell Nannie that he "hated to go so far from home just then."

Well, he did win the suit, but it took him two years to do it, instead of the six months that he expected. He got back a couple of months ago, and we 've seen a good deal of him since. Though Max is papa's friend, he 's ours too, and many a nice visit we have with him in the school-room, talking about Australia.

Max's mother 's got a house in the city this winter, and she has the girls constantly with her, — generally Nannie and Nora, and sometimes Betty as well. She takes the girls out

with her; and she always has them when she 's got company —"tea fights" or "spreads," as Phil calls them, — and we all spend an evening there now and then, even papa.

'T was at her house that we met Chad Whitcombe again. Maybe Chad has grown a trifle taller, — though he is still shorter than Nora, — and perhaps there 's a hair or two more in his mustache, but it 's as baby a yellow as it ever was, and so is his hair. He is still an exquisite, — looks as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox, — but I will say that he does n't seem to be so affected, — he does n't "aw! aw!" as much as he used to; and Max says he is really turning into quite a business man. I can see that Max would like us to be friendly with him again, but we were all pretty stiff that first evening, though Nora did thaw a little at the last. Nora always liked Chad better than did the rest of us, and besides, I have an idea that she thinks 't was the advice she gave him that afternoon in the school-room that made him drop his bad companions and go into business.

So lately Chad has taken to coming here again, and we can all see that he admires Nora. Nannie and the boys don't like this, and Betty gets furious every time he comes, though I can't see why they should think Nora could possibly like him better than Murray Unsworth or his handsome young uncle, Rollie Van Buren, or any of the other young fellows that call here. I said this to Betty one day, when she was talking of Chad; but she happened to be in one of her grandiloquent moods, — she gets 'em sometimes, — so she just stuck her nose in the air and remarked very loftily, "I will not discuss that question with a small boy."

Small boy, indeed! when I 'm as tall as she is, and barely two years younger! And yet only an evening or two later she walked into the school-room in a high state of excitement. "Chad Whitcombe is in the drawing-room talking to Nora," she announced, as she got inside the doorway; "I want you to go right down and thrash him, Jack."



"'You poor little eenty-teenty darling!' she said mockingly."

"Thrash him? What for?" I asked in surprise.

"Thrash him first, and then think of an excuse for doing it," she answered. Catching up a cane of Fee's that was lying near, she poked it into my hand, and shoved me toward the door. "Go — *on* — do!" she said impatiently. "You 're such a poke! Beat him hard, Jack, so I can hear his yells up here. Go!" She gave me another shove, and, I tell you, Betty's shoves are not easily resisted.

But I held on to the side of the door; I would n't go. "Why, Betty! *don't* act so silly!" I cried out indignantly. "I can't go and beat or kick a man that has n't done me a single thing, just for a freak of yours. I won't do it!" I broke away from her and went back to my seat at the table, where I 'd been reading.

Betty followed me and, taking a chair opposite, leaned her elbows on the table, her chin in her palms, and gazed at me with a provoking smile. "You poor little eenty-teenty darling!" she said mockingly. "Was it afraid it would get its little pate cracked?"

I was so mad that I jumped up and just went off to my room to read. She laughed as I ran down the steps, and a few minutes later I heard her playing the gayest sort of a waltz on the school-room piano! Thinking it over afterward, it occurred to me that Betty might have been in fun about my thrashing Chad. Betty is *very* peculiar — quite often I 'm not at all sure if she is in earnest or fun, and then she declares I 'm "dense" — that 's a favourite word with her — when it is really she that 's in fault. She is *so* provoking sometimes!

Well! as Judge would say, "this is certainly a very lengthy digression" from what I started to tell you of, — Alice 's coming to live with us. But I wanted you to know about Felix, and then one thing led on to another. Now I will go back to Alice.

II.

THE ARRIVAL.

TOLD BY JACK.

TO us boys it seemed as if Nannie and Betty, to say nothing of Nurse and Miss Marston, were for weeks getting ready for Alice. Such a cleaning and brushing as went on in the room that was to be hers! The furniture was hauled about and arranged and rearranged so often that Phil declared Betty was taking that as a new sort of calisthenics. Then, when it was finally settled, Nora was called on to give the finishing touches, because, as Kathie always says, with a gentle toss back of her long curls, "Nonie has such *beau*tiful taste!"

At last came the eventful day for Alice to arrive. She was due at the station at 6.10, and Phil and Betty were going to meet her, but it was n't time to start out, so we were all in the school-room. Some were studying, some amusing themselves, and some others just taking life easy. I should n't wonder if we have changed a little in the last few years. Nurse says we 're "growing up so fast she hardly knows us," and I suppose we are. Phil is certainly a big fellow — tall and broad — and he has a mustache now; it is n't much of an affair yet, but he thinks an awful lot of it! Fee can't raise a mustache, but he has what Phil considers is "a mighty neat little pair of sideboards," — he means side whiskers. Nannie and Nora have grown taller, and they wear their hair up. Nan has the same sweet, dear face, but Nora is even handsomer than she used to be. Betty, too, is beginning to put her hair up — evenings, though days, ex-

cept on Sundays, she still wears it in a thick "pigtail" down her back. I've been in long trousers for ages, and now I'm in the High School preparing for college — worse luck for me! Fee put aside for me the balance of the money aunt Lindsay had given him — after his expenses were paid — and papa has added the rest, so I'm to go through college. My heart sinks when I think of all I'll have to learn — I'm such a dunce! — but I suppose it's *got* to be gone through with. Kathie is growing tall, too, and it's very funny to see the young-lady airs she is beginning to put on, — she does copy Nora! Mädel is going to be short, we all think; she's just as yellow-haired and sweet-tempered and "dimply" as when she was a little tot. As for Paul and Alan — even Nurse (and she spoils 'em) says they're getting "entirely too big for their boots," — she means impudent; you can't tell them anything, they know it all.

This does seem as if we *were* growing up, does n't it? but in some other ways I'm afraid that we are just as childish as we ever were. Nora often gets provoked with us when we are carrying on, and tells us that "as a family we're *very* young for our age!" And she says it in a tone of voice that implies we ought to be ashamed of ourselves; but we are n't. For one thing we are all just as fond as ever of our old school-room; there's scarcely an afternoon that we don't meet there, when the boys get home, for a talk and a little fun before going downstairs to dinner.

This afternoon that I'm telling you about, we were all occupied — in different ways. Felix was seated on our old chintz-covered sofa, with cushions at his back and a law book open on his knee. Near him was Phil, and they were having a warm discussion over the exact location of a street down town. Nannie was writing a letter at the school-room table; Nora was there, too, and so was I, — she designing a pattern for what she calls a "centre-piece," and I studying. Kathie was sewing, seated off in a rocking-chair that squeaked

every time she rocked, though she did n't seem to mind it. Mädel was reading a fairy tale aloud to Alan in a sing-song tone of voice, and Judge lay stretched out at full length on the floor, both hands holding up his head, his heels in the air, reading by the waning afternoon light. Betty sat at the piano — "our old tin pan," she calls it — trying over a song. She had on her hat ready to start, and her coat lay on a chair near by.

"I declare, this piano gets worse and worse every day!" she exclaimed, stopping short in the middle of a bar. "I have to strike and *strike* some of the notes before they will make any sound. *We* never put it in this condition — it's the dreadful thumping that you younger ones give it!" darting a severe glance at Kathie and Paul, who were the only representatives of the "younger ones" that she could see without turning round.

Kathie tossed back her long curls and let her fancy-work drop in her lap, — she 's been working on that tea-cloth for months, sewing and ripping and sewing over again the unfortunate, extraordinary-looking daisies that are stamped on it, until Fee has nicknamed her Penelope. "Oh, Betty! we don't *all* thump," she said reproachfully. You see, Kathie plays very well; in fact, Miss Marston says that Nora and she "show a great deal of musical ability;" so she felt rather injured at Betty's remark.

But Judge waved his heels in the air and laughed. "H'm!" he drawled out, in that slow, pert way of his, without lifting his eyes from his book; "it was n't one of *us* four that Miss Marston spoke to this morning for playing so loudl —"

"Don't answer back," hastily interrupted Betty, shaking her hand at him. "Remember that 'small boys should be seen and not heard.'"

"Ho! ho! that 's a pretty good way to turn it off," chuckled Paul.

But Betty was devoting herself to her accompaniment, striking her chords decidedly so as to drown Judge's remarks. Over and over it she went until the mathematical problem that I was trying to work out began to get all jumbled up in my mind — though I must confess it does n't take much to do that.

"Put on the soft pedal, Miss Elizabeth," advised Nannie, wrinkling up her eyebrows.

Nora threw down her pencil impatiently. "I can't work while *that* noise is going on," she declared; and Phil stopped in his argument to sing out: "Say — Paul, Alan, remove that piano to the roof, and let our delicate young sister finish her pounding there."

But on went Betty, until presently Fee slammed his book shut and called out sharply: "Do get through with that strumming, Betty! It is very annoying! If you *must* play, let it be something that you know — in mercy to us all."

Paul gave another — very audible — chuckle; and Betty swung round on the piano stool and made a face at Felix, — I don't think she 'll outgrow that trick, if she lives a hundred years. "I know the accompaniment now; 't was just that one bit that bothered me," she said in a most amiable tone. "It 's a pretty song, and the words are *too* funny! Just listen." Then she swung back to the piano and sung:

"'A gallant young bumblebee, one bright summer day,
Fell in love with a gay butterfly;
And such mark'd attention to her did he pay,
That it made her feel painfully shy;
And her friends rudely said she must be off her head
To allow such uncalled-for advances;
What on earth could she see in that young bumblebee
And his vulgar and amorous glances?
But not one whit did that bumblebee care,
As he bumbled here and he bumbled there;
What he felt in his breast he wisely suppressed!
Oh! this courtly and portly young bumblebee!
Oh! this courtly and portly young bumblebee!"'

Of course we liked it. She sang it so gayly, with such arch glances and tossing of her head. and such merry emphasis of the funny words, that in about two minutes we were all laughing heartily.

Betty's voice isn't strong, but it is very sweet — what is called sympathetic — and she can make it sad or merry to suit her moods. She has some dear little songs, and she can sing them in a sweet tender way that would bring the tears to your eyes. Then the very next minute — if her mood happens to change — she will dash into something so gay and rollicking, and do it in such rattling good style, that you 'd almost wonder if it could be the same person singing. We get lots of fun out of Betty's songs.

"Well?" she said, at the end of the first verse, waiting for our decision.

"Very amusing!" "Fine!" "*Is n't* it funny?"

"Go on — give us the rest," we called out ; while Judge pounded his toes on the floor, and shouted: "Encore, encore! the house demands an encore!"

"Think a violin obligato would go well with it?" suggested Betty, over her shoulder. "You or Nannie could play it, Fee."

"I would love to, but I must finish my letter," replied Nannie. "You do it, Fee."

"I think I will," Felix said readily, putting his feet to the floor and reaching for his crutch. "Hand me my violin, will you, Jack? Now play the air, Betty — slowly, so I can catch it."

"Better still," cried Phil, jumping up from his chair. "I 've struck it! Let 's make it a trio, and I 'll come in with a mandolin part — eh? what d' you think?"

"Oh, *yes*, and I 'll play my cymbals," declared Judge, scrambling to his feet. Alan immediately deserted Mädel, and rushed off to the closet to get the "cymbals," — a home-made affair with which he and Judge make a horrible din.

"Indeed, you won't play your cymbals this time," remarked Betty, very decidedly. "Just remember what I told you about 'small boys.'"

Felix sat down on the sofa again, and took up his book. "All right," he said to Phil, with a wave of his hand, and getting sarcastic. "You go on and play your 'mandolin part,' and let Judge thump his cymbals to his heart's content, and we 'll all listen and enjoy it down to the ground!" Then he added, in a tone of disgust: "I 've never met such a family in all my life! We 're like a parcel of sheep, — one starts out to do or say something, and the others are all immediately seized with an insane desire to do or say the same thing, at the same time, and in the same manner. I suppose, if one of us should jump off the roof, all the others would feel bound to do likewise."

"'Imitation is the highest form of flattery,'" I put in slyly, thinking perhaps that might soothe him.

"Speak for yourself, if you please, Felix," observed Nora, with a toss of her head. "I think that *I* have *some* originality."

As Betty says, "there was war in the air," and there might have been trouble if dear, peaceable Nannie had n't laid aside her letter and started in to smooth things out.

"Oh! try the obligato, Fee dear," she said, in that sweet, sensible way of hers that always calms us down, "and see how it goes with the song. I want so much to hear it. Then, if the violin does n't suit, perhaps the mandolin will, and Phil can take his turn. Try it, Fee." Then to Paul: "Wait until by and by, Judge, and I 'll play something that will give you a good chance to use your cymbals. I don't think they would go well with a song of this sort."

But Fee kept turning over the leaves of his book, as if looking for his place.

"The first violin is wanted. Where *is* the first violin?" cried Phil, loudly, in his stage-manager manner, glaring around

at us and pretending not to see Felix. "The first violin to the front — make way for the World-Renowned Violinist, Monsieur Felix." As he spoke — before any one had the least idea of what he was going to do — he swooped down suddenly on Fee, and, catching him up in his arms, ran over and deposited him in a chair beside the piano. "There!" he exclaimed with an air of satisfaction; then, throwing himself into an attitude of rapt admiration, he burst out with:

"'Come sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair *large* ears, my gentle j-o-o-y!'"

He mouthed the words abominably; and leaning forward flourished his hands about Fee's face as if to pat him on the cheeks.

But Fee hastily drew back. "Get out!" he exclaimed, laughing, putting up his arm to keep Phil off. "A delicate little Titania *you* are!"

"So I've been told," Phil said, drooping his head bashfully, and with a smirk that made us laugh. Snatching the violin from me, he thrust it into Fee's hands, at the same time nudging Betty to begin.

"We will now be favoured with 'The Bee's Courtship,' with violin obligato," announced Phil, adding in a loud whisper behind his hand, "Owing to a slight family difficulty, the mandolin part is indefinitely postponed."

Fee took the violin and began tuning up, but he didn't look exactly happy. Nora gave a disgusted sniff and cast a commiserating glance at Phil, as much as to say, "Just see how he is imposed on!" But Nannie and I exchanged a sly smile, — we knew how the thing would end.

"Go ahead," Felix told Betty; seating himself on the broad arm of the chair Phil had set him in, he tucked his



violin under his chin, and they began, — it sounded well too: —

"'The very next day, 'midst the sweet-scented hay,
The bumblebee told her his passion;
Though she did not say yes, she did not say nay,
But blushed in the most approved fashion.
And *his* friends, one and all, a mass meeting did call,
When of this they became first acquainted!
And that butterfly pert they denounced as a flirt—'"

The violin stopped abruptly. "Say, Philippus, old man get your mandolin and join in," Fee said, in the most off-hand tone imaginable, as if they 'd never spoken of it before. "Come on."

Phil was turning Betty's pages for her. "Oh, I 'll only spoil things, — you know, put you out," he remarked with would-be indifference, though his hand went right out for his mandolin, which lay on the top of the piano.

"No, you won't," assured Fee, in a most encouraging tone. "Come on. Give him the key, Betty."

"You might have told me you were going to stop," grumbled Betty. She had full speed on and could n't stop herself right away.

"Now we 'll begin? Let 's go over that verse again," directed Felix.

But here Paul saw an opportunity and seized it. "Fee, why may n't I play my cymbals too?" he asked. "I can keep time as well as anybody — say, Fee, Fee! *do* let me!"

"I guess he 'll do as well as Phil can," put in Alan; he thinks whatever Judge does is just the thing.

Felix eyed Paul severely. "You are a persistent little animal!" he said; then, as Judge, looking full at him, produced the cymbals from behind his back, smiling in that slow, impudent way he can, Fee added in a tone of mock resignation, the corners of his mouth twitching with amusement: "Oh, certainly, you may play your cymbals, and your

drum and fife too, and any other charming musical instrument that you happen to possess. There 's no use trying to raise the musical standard of *this* family. Come on, all of you." He waved his arm toward us. "Come, let us sing and play, and make a tremendous racket, and enjoy ourselves immensely."

"But the song is written for only one voice, — you 'll just spoil it!" exclaimed Betty.

Not the slightest attention was paid to her remonstrance. In about a minute more there were seven people crowded together as tight as they could crowd round that little piano, all craning their necks to see the words and music. Betty said afterward that Kathie and Mädel roared right into her ears, so that she could n't hear her own voice. Felix fiddled away as if for dear life, by this time on a broad grin; Phil picked his mandolin so loudly that he broke a string; Judge clanged those horrid cymbals without regard to either time or mercy; and Alan, finding himself too short to see the words over the shoulders of the others, put his hands behind his back, and stood, legs wide apart, making a loud hissing sound through his teeth. Above all the noise every now and then rose Betty's sweet bird-like voice.

Excepting Fee and Betty, everybody was away out of tune. They did n't know the song, and each one was rendering it in his and her own particular independent style, — 't was a regular "tug of war," and the piano got left every time. About every ten minutes or so they 'd break down, scold somebody or other in the crowd roundly for it, and then start off again in just as dead earnest as before, and just as out of tune.

There was no use trying to study, and I did n't want to add one more discordant note to the rest, so I sat on the edge of the school-room table and "conducted" for them, — though no one paid any attention to my motions — waving a stiff old paint-brush of Fee's for a baton. It was a terrific din!

You may be sure we knew papa was out, — though he is not quite so particular about noises as he used to be.

Nannie and I laughed till the tears came to our eyes; but Nonie got mad. "Such ridiculous childishness!" she declared scornfully, and walked out of the room. But she was n't gone very long.

The musicians were at the third verse, and going it at a great pace, — they had actually got to the middle of the verse without more than three breakdowns, — when Nora came into the school-room again. I saw at once by her expression that she had something to say. "Betty, have *you* forgotten that Alice Endicott is to arrive this afternoon, and that you are to meet her at the station?" she asked, in a tone of voice that commanded attention.

"Don't stop! Go right on and finish the verse — 't won't take but a minute or two," Fee said hurriedly. And on they went.

"Betty!" called Nora again, a little sharply this time, "did you hear me speak to you? You have barely time to reach Forty-second Street before the train is due." Mind you, Phil was to go, too; but she said not a word to him. I do believe Nora cares more for Phil than for the whole rest of us put together; very seldom does she undertake to nag *him*. And yet he teases her unmercifully sometimes. "Why don't you speak to her?" continued Nora, turning to Nannie. "What will Alice think of us if no one is there to meet — ?"

"Yes, Betty, hurry!" broke in Nannie, quickly, looking at the school-room clock. "It is later than I thought it was."

"I 'm ready! I 'm *ready!*" exclaimed Betty, ending "The Bee's Courtship" with a sudden flourish. "Come, Phil, hurry, do! It 's time for us to fly. Here, Jack, help me on with my coat." As she spoke, she whirled herself round on the piano stool, unexpectedly scattering Kathie and Paul and Alan, and snatched up her coat. "My

gloves — my gloves! where are those unnecessary pieces of clothing? I certainly had them just before I sat down to play. Jack, have you eaten them?"

"Why don't you tie them round your neck on a string?" asked Phil; "you 're always losing your things."

"That 's a base calumny!" cried Betty; she was hunting wildly behind the sofa cushions and under the chairs for her lost property, and Nannie and I were helping her.

"No, it is the truth," declared Nora. "There is hardly a time you go out that you have n't to hunt for some of your things. It is getting to be very tiresome."

"Ah! here they are!" exclaimed Betty, pouncing upon her gloves, which had fallen by the side of the piano. "You perverse things!" giving them a little flirt. Then she caught up her skirt and danced about Nora, singing:

"'As he bumbled here and he bumbled there,
What he felt in his breast he wisely suppressed!
Oh! this courtly and portly young bumblebee!
Oh! this courtly and portly young bumble — !'"

"You 've no time to waste," interrupted Nannie. "*Do* hurry, Miss Elizabeth."

Phil caught his hat off the head of Fee's plaster Juno, and put it on. "I 'm going," he said, starting toward the door, "and you can come when you get ready."

"'She flitted here and she flitted there:
"They love tittle tattle as babies love a rattle!"
Said this shy little, spry little butterfly!
This sly little, spry little butterfly!'"

sang Betty, making a dash after Phil.

"Really, Betty is too grown up for such hoidenish behaviour," asserted Nora, very much provoked. "She sets a bad example for the younger ones," glancing at Kathie, who was looking on with a demure smile. "I can't imagine what Alice will think of her!"

Now usually Fee does n't approve of Betty's wildness, frequently he teases her about it, but when Nora said this he seemed to get quite annoyed. "Oh, bother Alice!" he exclaimed impatiently. He had pulled himself on to the piano stool and was picking out with one hand the accompaniment to Betty's song. "It 's been nothing but Alice, Alice, from morning until night, for the last week or ten days, and I 'm about tired of it," he went on, getting on his feet and beginning to settle his crutch under his arm.

"Why, Fee!" and "Really, Felix, I 'm surprised at you!" came simultaneously from Nannie and Nora.

Just then there was a sudden stir at the door. Some one was coming in, causing Phil and Betty to step back; and we all turned to look. It was papa, and beside him stood a young lady — a tall, strange girl — who was smiling at us.

"Where is Nannie?" inquired papa, peering around him. "My dears, this is our young friend — "

Nannie started forward, but Betty was ahead of her. "Why! — it 's *Alice!*" she called out, interrupting papa; and darting at the girl she kissed her warmly.

"Yes, it is Alice," said the new-comer, in such a nice, friendly way that I liked her on the spot. "Now really it is no one's fault but my own," she went on quickly, as Phil began to say something apologetic. "It seems that I made a mistake in the time, — my train left Boston earlier than I thought it did. But I had n't the least trouble getting here; Mrs. Elton came with me to the house, and on the stoop I met Mr. Rose. This is Nannie, I know," holding out her hand to Nan; "and that tall girl *must* be Nora."

Then papa went away, and Betty and Nannie began introducing us to the stranger.

Now usually I dislike being introduced to people, — there 's such an awkward pause after it; you always want to say something very affable and natural — off-hand, you know — to start a conversation, and for the life of you you



"'Why! — it 's *Alice!*' she called out."

can't think of a single thing; then you get embarrassed and wish either the person or you were out of the room. But I did n't feel so with Alice, for she 's got the nicest sort of manners, something like Nannie's, — I never even thought of being embarrassed.

"Really, this introduction is hardly needed between us," Alice said, in that bright, frank way of hers. "I 've heard so much of the Roses from my cousin Hilliard, and then from Betty, that I feel as if I knew you all well — and the dear old school-room too. Yes, there are the plaster casts and the pictures and the book-shelves and the 'charger,' just as Betty described them," glancing around the room as she spoke. Then she added quickly: "You are all *so* good to let me come and live with you while papa and mamma are in Europe. They sailed yesterday morning; and I sha'n't see them again for a whole long year — "

Her abrupt pause appealed to us, and we greeted her warmly, — that is, all except Felix. Instead of shaking hands with her, as the rest of us did, he merely bowed when it came his turn to be introduced, and stiffly too, I thought. He stood leaning against the piano, and I noticed that he had slipped his crutch behind him, out of sight. In meeting strangers he is always so sensitive about his lameness, — just as if anybody would think less of him for it after they know him. But you can't make him believe that, — he thinks so much of health and strength. Poor old Fee!

Alice looked a little surprised, but she still held out her hand. "*Please* don't treat me as a stranger," she said, with such a sweet friendliness that Fee's hand went right out to meet hers. But he coloured up uncomfortably, and all he said was, "How d' you do?" in what Judge calls his "society manner." Then the girls carried Alice off to show her her room.

From the way Betty had talked, we expected to find Alice a regular beauty, but she is n't, though she *is* a very nice-

looking girl. She has the sort of face that "grows" on you, — you like it better and better as you get to know her. Her eyes are rather small, — they 're a lovely deep blue colour, though, — her nose turns up just a little, and her mouth is large; still it 's a nice shape, and when she laughs — as she does quite often — her teeth look as white as pearls. Then she 's got lots of dry brown hair that grows nicely round her forehead, and a beautiful colour in her cheeks and lips, and she 's quite a stout girl — I don't mean fat. She looks a picture of perfect health; and she 's just as nice and jolly as she can be. I *like* Alice!

As the door closed behind the girls, Felix limped over to where Phil had taken a seat on the edge of the school-room table, swinging one leg and twisting the ends of his tiny mustache, — he 's trying to make 'em curl. "Do you suppose she heard what I said?" Fee asked anxiously. Then I knew why he 'd acted so stiffly to Alice. Fee is never gushing with strangers, or in fact with anybody, but he is usually very polite, — "old-fashionedly so," Nora tells him sometimes, though the rest of us admire his manner very much. "Do you think she did?" he repeated.

"Well —" Phil hesitated, but Fee's eyes were on him.

"Well?" he questioned.

"I 'm afraid — she did," Phil answered reluctantly. "I got the full benefit of your remark from where I stood just outside the door, and at that moment she was right behind me. Still," with a twinkle in his eyes, "she *may* be subject to ear-ache, and wear cotton in her ears, as Nurse does. In that case, of course, you 're safe. Why not boldly assume that she *is* so afflicted, and thus regain your wonted charming serenity of manner? She does look a fine specimen of health, but looks are frequently deceptive and, as nurse could affirm, ear-ache is no respecter of physique."

But Fee did not smile. "I 'm in a horrible quandary," he said uneasily, his forehead wrinkled up in a frown. "To

apologise, if she did not hear my unlucky remarks, would be to make matters still more awkward than they are at present. On the other hand, should she have heard and I say nothing in apology, she 'll think me a cad as well as a boor. I 'd like to know what to do!" very gloomily. Then he broke out impatiently: "This is a fine starting out of having a stranger among us! Think of the exasperation of having to treat Miss Alice Endicott with kid gloves and company manners for three hundred and sixty-five consecutive days, no matter what one's mood may be!" He groaned. "It is going to be disgusting! I wish to goodness she had remained in her native town." Even as he spoke, he glanced nervously over his shoulder, to be sure that the school-room door was closed. Then he caught Phil's eye, and they both began laughing.

III.

AT FIRST.

TOLD BY JACK.

ALICE soon settled into her place among us. In a very short time it seemed the most natural thing in the world to count her as one of our girls, and to include her in everything that was going on. Though she was supposed first of all to be Betty's friend, Nannie and Nora got to like her very much, — in fact, she became a general favourite; she was so good-natured and friendly and sensible. Papa took quite a fancy to her, and sometimes he actually had conversations at the dinner-table with her!

All of the young people that come to our house know that papa is a *very* clever man, and of course they respect and admire him immensely, but somehow they never can find much to say to him. And we understand just how it is, for — excepting Felix and Nannie — we 're most of us troubled that way ourselves. Now that the girls are growing up and we have more company, papa comes in the drawing-room quite often of an evening and stays a little while. But we 're pretty sure that he does n't enjoy these times. Max can get him started on his work because he knows all about the Chaldeans and those other ancients that papa writes of; and sometimes Dr. Archard or old Mr. Van Buren — he 's Murray Unsworth's grandfather — hits on some topic that interests papa and sets him talking, but, as Phil expresses it, usually "conversation languishes" while he is present. Papa is not an easy person to talk to. The ordi-

nary, every-day subjects that one would speak about to other people always seem too trifling to be even mentioned to him.

But evidently Alice did n't feel this way about it, for she appeared not the least timid or nervous with papa. She chatted away to him on all sorts of subjects, as not even Fee or Nannie could have done. And, to our great surprise, papa not only listened but seemed to like it! He took Alice in the study and showed her the Fetich, — it 's been published and stands on his book-shelves now, in five great volumes, — and one day, when she was in there with Nannie, he explained to her all about the new work that he has just begun.

The younger children are quite chummy with Alice, and she and Phil are very friendly, — he jumps to wait on her, and one day I heard him tell Felix that she was "up and down the nicest girl he 'd ever met!" Fee's only answer to this was a funny little grunt, that might mean anything, — approval or disapproval.

Felix is the only member of the family that has n't fallen under the spell of Alice's charming manners. He is n't at all disagreeable to her, you know, — in fact, he is *very* polite, — but it 's the sort of politeness that holds a person off at arm's length and makes a stranger of him, — entirely different from the way in which the rest of us treat Alice; except Fee, we all call her by her first name (and so she does us), but he addresses her as "Miss Endicott," and sometimes speaks to her without calling her anything. In the drawing-room evenings he keeps very much to himself, and instead of coming in the school-room when he gets home from business, and talking things over, as he used to do, he goes now first to his own room, and has Nannie come there every afternoon for a confab before he 'll go upstairs.

We don't any of us like this arrangement one bit; we just *love* to have Fee with us, and to hear all he has been

doing through the day; and besides by his staying away we lose Nannie, too, for that time.

Nannie advised us not to say anything to Fee about the way he was acting. "Don't take any notice of it," she said, one day, "and by and by, perhaps before very long, he 'll get accustomed to Alice's presence here, and go back to his old way of being constantly with us. You know," glancing appealingly at us, "we must make allowances for Fee, — he is n't like the rest of us. In the first place, he does n't make friends with people as readily as we do; and then his lameness, his helplessness, makes him *very* sensitive in regard to meeting and being with strangers. There is n't one of us," she went on warmly, "that has so independent a spirit as Fee, that longs so to be helpful, of use in the world, as he; and not one of us," her voice dropping sadly, "that is, in a way, so forced to be helpless. It is a heavy cross, and one that he will have to carry all his life. Don't be hard on him."

"*I'd* be the last one to do that!" exclaimed Phil, flushing up to the roots of his hair. "God knows that many a time if I could I would have changed places with Felix."

"Oh, my dear! don't feel hurt at what I said," cried Nannie, reaching out her hand and catching hold of his. "I *know* you would never be hard on Fee, — why, Phil, you are everything to him. His helplessness would press twice as heavily on him but for your patience, your tenderness, and your constant care —"

"Oh, come now, Nancy, draw it mildly," broke in Phil, getting embarrassed. "Don't give us a fancy picture!"

"No one in this family will ever be 'hard,' as you call it, on Felix," observed Nora, crisply. "But, on the other hand, there is no reason why everybody should spoil him, and let him give way to his moods without a word of remonstrance. A talking to would do him good sometimes. *I* know why he is so stiff with Alice and keeps out of her

company, — he knows she overheard his rude remarks the day she arrived; and instead of apologising, as he ought to, he assumes this superior air and ignores our society."

"You 're very unjust to Felix, Nora!" spoke up Nannie, quickly. Nothing can stir Nan's temper like a word against her twin; he is the apple of her eye.

"Where 's the sense of apologising when he is *not* sure she heard him?" I put in hastily. "'T would only complicate matters."

"She *did n't* hear him," Phil said, in a tone of conviction. "I 've sounded her on the subject several times — sprung it on her, so to speak — and I 've come to the conclusion that she did n't hear one word of Fee's unfortunate remarks. You know Alice is so frank she 'd have been sure to let it out if she had any feeling about the matter. And I 've told Fee that."

"All the more disagreeable, then, of him to act as he is doing," persisted Nora. "I really don't see why Felix should be so *very* sensitive; I 'm sure he is n't the only lame person in the world, — there are people a great deal worse off than he is in that respect. Why, only yesterday Betty and I saw a man — on the street — who had no legs at all. Now, if Felix — "

"That reminds me!" interrupted Phil, before Nannie could get out even one indignant word. "Lend me your ears, O fair Eleanora," he went on, in that whimsical way of his, "while I 'point a moral and adorn a tale' for your special edification. It comes in the way of a late experience of Nurse's, which I overheard her relating to Cook. It runs in this wise: Cook set the ball of conversation a-rolling. 'An' sure, Misthress Dale, it 's meself that 's glad to see ye up an' aroun' afther bein' in the dintist's cheer,' she says, in a tone of deep sympathy. 'An' did the spalpeen lave ye any teeth at all, at all, in yer pore hid?' 'Mighty few at that,' answers nurse, holding on to her jaw. 'An' what I

went through in that cheer, ma'am, can't be told! "Will ye have gas, mum?" sez the dintist to me. "No, *sur!*" sez I to him; "'f I 'm to lose them teeth, I 'm a-goin' to do it with me two eyes wide open," sez I. Well, with that, inter me mouth he pops them pinchers, an' 'f you 'll believe me, ma'am, it 's me very whole jawbone as I thought was goin'! As you 're knowin', Mrs. O'Toole, I 'm a widder 'oman, goin' on in years; an' most respectable an' well conducted, you must allow, but I will tell you, I was in that agony that I let a scream an' then another, fit to scare the life out 'f you. *N-e-v-e-r* another tooth goes out of *my* mouth be the help 'f them pinchers — not while there 's breath in this body.

"'Well, ma'am, what with the terrabul fright an' the agony I was that weak that I set on the sofy after 't was all over, an' I cried like a infant! While I was a-takin' on up walks a fem-ale — 't is n't a lady or even a 'oman I 'd be callin' her — the heartless creechur! Sez she to me, *very* sharp like: "Air yur the person what 's been screechin' so loud?" sez she; "how many teeth has you had *e*stracted?" "Two," sez I, very stiff; "an' it 's two too many, I kin assure you." "Two?" sez she, a-holdin' up her hands; "only *two!* An' you makin' sich a fuss! Why, that pore gell over there," p'inting to a young 'oman settin' up in a cheer, straight and chipper 's you please, — "that pore gell over there," sez she, "has just had every one of her upper teeth took out, an' not a whimper has anybody heard from *her.*" Well, comin' on top 'f what I 'd been through, that just upsot me temper. "Ma'am," sez I, gettin' up very quick from that sofy, "it makes no diff'rence to me if that young 'oman had out every tooth in her head — I ain't feelin' *her* pain, I 'm feelin' *me own* pain, an' two teeth 's as much as *I* kin stand." An' with that, Mrs. O'Toole, ma'am, I picks meself up an' walks out 'f that place.'"

Phil put his head on one side, and winked slyly at Nora. "See the point?" he asked with a grin. He 's a first-class

mimic, and he had imitated Nurse's voice and every gesture to a T.

Nannie was trying hard to keep a straight face, and I was laughing; but Nora stared blankly up at Phil without even a smile, though I 'm pretty sure she took in the meaning of his story. "I wonder you 've never gone in for low comedy," she remarked, in her most "haughty" manner. "It certainly would suit your style." Then, turning to Nannie, with a perfect change of subject: "Is n't it time for Alice and Betty to be coming home? I think I 'll get on my things and walk up the avenue to meet them; I have n't been out to-day."

"Happy thought! Go, by all means, my love, and get the air," urged Phil, quickly, in what we call his "fatherly" tone. "And, being of an amiable disposition, I 'll forgive your late slighting remark and accompany you. Then," he added in an aside to us, "coming home she can pair off with Betty — and *I* will take Alice. See? Fine scheme!"

"I prefer to go alone. I don't want you," Nora said crushingly.

But Phil refused to be offended. "Oh, yes, you do; you know very well that you 'll be only too delighted to have my company," he insisted. "Get on your things, and we 'll start. Come." As he spoke, he threw his arm over her shoulders, and drew her out of the room. And looking through the window a few minutes later, Nannie and I saw them sailing up the street, chatting and smiling at each other in the most friendly manner.

Now, after what Nannie had said, anybody but Nora would have let things right themselves; but no, she must needs interview Fee about his keeping out of the school-room, and on what she called "slighting" Alice. And, of course, it did n't help matters any; in fact, I think it only made Felix the more determined to go on in his own way, until the day — But there, I 'll come to that later on. I



"'See the point?' he asked."

was passing Fee's door on my way to the school-room when I heard him say, very coolly and sarcastically, from the bed where he had thrown himself down to rest, "I more than appreciate your efforts to make me a polite member of the family, Nora, but I feel it honest to tell you that your kindness is wasted. Mine is an incorrigible case, and, what is more, I prefer that it should be so. I never was given to falling on people's necks, and I 've no intention of beginning it now."

"I spoke for your good — I did n't wish Alice to think you a boor. But I sha'n't say another word," declared Nonie. "You may act as you please." And she walked out of the room.

"A thousand thanks! I shall certainly avail myself of the privilege," Felix called after her teasingly.

But Nora ran up the stairs in hot haste, and entered the school-room with me, looking flushed and angry.

Phil, Alice, and Betty and the younger children were gathered around the table looking at some photographs of different parts of Europe that Alice had just received from her father.

"Oh, Nora, these are beautiful!" exclaimed Betty, as we got inside the door. "Where is Felix? He should see these."

"Yes, where is your brother?" inquired Alice; when she says "your brother," we always know that she means Fee. "Is n't he coming up?"

"No, I think not," answered Nora, so curtly that Phil asked hastily, thoughtlessly, "Hullo! why not?"

Nonie was so mad that she could n't resist the opportunity. "For two reasons," she said deliberately: "one is that he is what is commonly known as a 'crank' of the first quality; the other that he prefers his own society to ours."

There was a dead silence after this speech. Of course we have "scraps" between ourselves now and then, and

speak out our opinions very plainly, but we never talk against one another to outsiders, nor run one another down before strangers, — usually we *scorn* to do such a thing! But Nora went recklessly on — perhaps our silence and the disapproval which I am sure must have shown on our faces annoyed her. "As you are to be with us for some time, Alice," she said, "you might as well know now that Felix is a person who suffers from moods, and when in those moods he obeys no will but his own. The truth of it is, on account of his being delicate, everybody has spoiled him. I tell you this as an excuse for any peculiarities of behaviour on his part — "

"*Well!*" exclaimed Betty, indignantly, bringing her clinched hand down on the table with emphasis; and Phil broke in hastily. "I would n't say any more if I were you, Nora," he advised, in such a stern voice that Nora's colour deepened and she tossed her head.

"Oh, I know you all think he is perfection," she said defiantly, "but I don't share in that delusion. Felix can be both rude and disagreeable."

The younger children were staring at her; and Alice looked most uncomfortable. But I really felt more sorry for Nora, for I knew that when her temper cooled down she 'd feel awfully mean and sorry for what she had said. When a person is angry all he can think of is what 's been said to him and hurt his feelings, but after it 's all over then he begins to think of some of the mean things *he* has said, and then — does n't he begin to feel pretty small and mean though! I know, for I 've been there myself!

"He has never been anything but most polite to me," Alice said eagerly. "I think he is *very* nice! But" — she paused abruptly, and a disturbed expression came over her face; Alice has such a frank face that you can read her feelings right on it — "perhaps — it has just occurred to me," she went on hesitatingly, looking anxiously around

at us, "that perhaps my being here — the presence of a stranger, I mean — makes a difference to your brother — in the way of being with you."

"Nonsense! *not* at all — don't *think* of such a thing!" cried Phil, fairly rushing the words out, meanwhile glaring at Nora to be quiet; while Betty caught up a photo, upside down, and exclaimed in a tone of would-be rapture:

"'These views *are* beautiful!"



"'Some of us have been eating *per*simmons,' drawled Judge."

Regardless of Phil's glances, Nora opened her mouth to speak — I got so nervous! I did n't know what next she might say — when Nannie came in. "How cosey you all look in here this bleak afternoon!" she said cheerfully; if she noticed our disturbed faces, she gave no sign of it. "What are you doing, — looking at the new photos?"

"Some of us have been eating *per*simmons," drawled Judge, with a sly chuckle. That 's one of Nurse's sayings; if the children are cross or disagreeable, she 's very fond of telling them, "It 's plain to be seen that you 've been eatin' persimmons an' got your temper all puckered up;" so we understood Paul's speech. Alan and Kathie and Mädel giggled. I 'm afraid Betty did, too; and Nora threw a withering glance at "Mr. Impertinence," as she often calls Judge.

But Nan appeared not to have heard the remark. "Mrs. Derwent and Chad Whitcombe are in the drawing-room, Hannah tells me," she said; "won't you go down with me, Nora, and help entertain them?" adding, "I know they will want to see you."

There was a little pause; then Nora said, "Well," in a tone of unwilling assent; and with a rather defiant glance round the table, as if challenging us to say anything, she got up and went out with Nannie. I 'm sure that Phil and Bettie were as relieved as I was when the school-room door closed behind her.

Nora is a nice girl, and there 's no doubt that she is very handsome, — it 's a pleasure merely to look at her sometimes, — but the trouble with her is that she 's always so positive *she* is right in everything and everybody else wrong. And *her* way of doing things must be *the* way. Still, as I said, Nonie is a nice girl, and lots of people admire her. She can entertain a whole roomful of visitors alone, and enjoys doing it, where the other girls would get nervous and embarrassed; and when we have company to dinner or lunch, Nannie says that Nonie is invaluable — she always knows just what to do — if only she would n't nag at people and want 'em to walk just the chalk line she lays down. Well, I suppose 'most everybody 's got some queer ways, — Betty declares I have, and I *know* she has, — so perhaps the best way, as Nannie often tells us, is just to make the best of the things in one another that we don't like, though one can't help feeling provoked sometimes.

"I 'm awfully sorry that happened this afternoon," Phil told Betty, later on. "If Alice had n't connected Fee's stiffness with her being here, I 'm afraid she certainly will, now that Nora's speech has started the idea in her head. I would n't have had it happen for a farm. Anyway, what was the matter with Nora?"

"Mad!" answered Betty, briefly. Then, as she glanced

across the drawing-room to where Alice sat talking to papa, she added very positively, "Alice only said that, — she does n't really think that Fee minds her being here. She is n't the sort of girl to imagine that people dislike her."

"I sincerely hope she does n't," Phil said earnestly.

I did n't say anything to contradict Betty, but all the same I did n't agree with her that Alice was so oblivious of Fee's behaviour. I thought she had been rather quiet all the evening —she is usually very lively, — and every now and then I noticed that she glanced over at Fee as he sat talking with Murray Unsworth, with what seemed to me like a puzzled expression on her face. And when we separated at bedtime, instead of shaking hands with us boys as she generally does for good-night, she just called out, "Good-night! good-night, friends!" and ran on ahead to her room.

Phil looked disappointed. I think he would have rushed after her and said something if he had n't been helping Felix up the stairs. "Hold on!" he sung out. "Wait a minute, Alice; I want to speak to you."

"It will keep until to-morrow morning; good-night!" answered Alice, with a little laugh; then we heard her door close.

IV.

FRIENDSHIP.

TOLD BY JACK.

ONE afternoon, about a week later, I was sitting in Fee's room waiting for him to come home; I wanted him to help me with a beastly problem that had nearly twisted my brains. When I heard the front door shut — if you 're not careful it goes to with a bang that can be heard all over the house — I went out in the hall and looked over the banisters to see if the boys were coming. Felix seemed to be the only one in sight. As soon as I was sure he was alone, I ran down. "Shall I help you upstairs, Fee?" I asked, when I got near enough.

Fee looked up with a pleasant smile. "Hullo! that you, Jack?" he said. "No; I feel pretty good to-day; I think I 'll try to see if I can get up this first flight alone. Wait for me up there in the niche; if I 'm not mistaken I 'll be glad enough of your help by the time I reach there." There 's a niche in the wall near the head of the steps; it was intended for statuary or a plant, or something like that, but there 's nothing in it, and we are all, Fee especially, fond of sitting there to rest for a few minutes on our way to the school-room; so now I took my seat there, keeping an eye on Felix meanwhile lest he should want me. But as it happened he did n't get started as soon as he expected.

While he was speaking to me, along the hall, from the basement, came our old dog Major. He was delighted to see Felix, and jumped and frisked about in very lively style,

and, leaning on his crutch, Fee began playing with him, holding out his cane for Major to leap over.

Now I knew that was a risky thing for him to do, for Major is an awfully clumsy dog, — he 's getting old, and is apt to lose his balance and tumble against a person when he least expects it. "Be careful, Fee, he 'll upset you," I warned, and I went down a step or two nearer.

But Felix did n't like that. "Just stay where you are, wait for me there," he said rather shortly. So I went back, and I 'd barely got seated in the niche again when the very thing I feared happened. I heard Fee exclaim: "Look out, Major! down, sir, *down!* Oh! you 'll knock me over!" The next moment away went cane and crutch rattling against the marble tiling — out of reach, and Felix made an uncertain wavering step forward, throwing out his hands for the newel-post that was just beyond his reach.

"I 'm coming!" I called out, and sprang down the steps two at a time. But suddenly I stopped, hesitated, then turned and went back to the niche, — some one who 'd been in the drawing-room had heard Fee call out, and immediately rushed to the rescue. It was Alice.

"Do let me help you," she urged; she already had her strong round arm under his elbow to steady him. "Now take hold of my shoulder. Yes, that 's right; and please don't hesitate to depend on me, — I am really very strong." They moved slowly over to one of the hall chairs, where Fee sat down. "Now I 'll get your stick," said Alice; picking it up and the crutch, she took them to him.

"I 'm sure I am very much obliged to you for your opportune assistance," Felix said; but there was n't a hearty ring in his voice; then the colour went all over his face as he looked up at her. "Now you see what a poor unfortunate I am," he added, with a sort of proud humility. Poor Fee! I fancy that just then he felt keenly the great contrast between them, — he so delicate and helpless, unable to move a step without

assistance of some kind, and she tall, straight, noble-looking, the picture of health, with her broad shoulders and that beautiful red in her cheeks.

But Alice seemed to have no such thought. She answered Fee quickly, throwing out her hands impulsively as she spoke. "Don't *ever* call yourself an unfortunate while you have such a mind to be thankful for," she exclaimed. "Intellectual power is, in my estimation, the most valuable gift that God can bestow on any one."

Fee shook his head. "It 's away below par as compared with health," he said. "You are not a fair judge, — you 've never been without it. Given all the wisdom of the sages and a weak, helpless body, and one's opportunities *must* be limited; while with even a mediocre intellect and good health one might achieve wonders. I know which *I* should be only too glad to take, were the choice allowed me."

"So do I — give me brains every time," cried Alice, with a positive little wag of her head. Then they looked at each other and laughed. Though Fee would never agree with her opinion, — he thinks so much of health, — still I think what she said pleased him.

"Lucky for me that you were in the drawing-room," he remarked in a much warmer tone than when he had thanked her, "or I might now be sitting in the middle of the floor waiting for some one to come along and set me on my pins again." Now I thought that was a curious thing for Fee to say, when he knew I was there on the stairs just to help him, — it seemed to me he must have heard me call out and start to come to him.

"You clumsy old rascal!" Felix went on; he caught up Judge's cap that was lying on the hat-rack table beside him, and crushing it into a ball threw it at Major. The old doggie had retired to the other side of the hall, where he sat lolling out his tongue and looking at Fee with big, wistful eyes that as much as said, "I know I 've done some mischief, but I

really did n't mean to." But when the cap touched him he took that as a sign of forgiveness; with a short, deep bark of joy he bounced on his master's knees and tried to lick his face.

"I am *so* glad I was near enough to be of service," Alice said, in that friendly way of hers. "I saw you come up the stoop, and was on my way to speak to you, — that is how I arrived so promptly on the scene of action."

Fee had pushed Major away and had hold of the arms of the chair to raise himself to his feet, but now he paused and looked up at her. "Yes?" he said, — I know he was surprised; "you were coming to speak to me?" Then, politely, "I hope there is something I can do for you."

"Perhaps I should not say anything about it — " hesitated Alice; then she went on, speaking very quickly, "but something has been troubling me for several days — and I think it is always best for people to be frank with one another; so I thought — I — I thought we had better talk the matter over." She had drawn a little nearer, and stood with one hand resting on the hat-rack table, her head held high — Alice is n't a bit haughty, but we 've noticed that she always puts her head up in the air when she gets embarrassed.

"You are right; misunderstandings are not apt to last where there is perfect frankness," Fee said kindly. "And you may be quite sure of my interest in whatever you tell me. But won't you sit down? How remiss! I hope you will excuse my not thinking of it sooner."

He tried to rise, but for an instant Alice laid her fingers lightly on his coat-sleeve to dissuade him. "*Please* don't make any apology," she broke out a little impatiently; "you would n't if it were one of the girls; and that is what I would like — that you should not make a stranger of me. That is just what is troubling me!" She put her hands behind her back and looked earnestly at Fee. "I enjoy being here with Betty and the others," she said, "and it is *very* good of you all

to take me in while papa and mamma are in Europe; but — I 'm dreadfully afraid that I am in the way."

Well, just as soon as she said this, I knew that the idea Nora's remarks had started in her mind was still there — perhaps she was going to speak to Fee about it! I was *sure* that he knew I was in the niche waiting, as he had told me to, to help him upstairs; but Alice did n't know I was there — she might not wish to speak to Fee about this matter before me. And yet it was so embarrassing to break right into the conversation.

Still I felt I should make some sign of my presence, so I stood up and, going down a step or two, coughed. They both glanced up, and I would have declared that they saw me; in fact, it seemed to me that Fee nodded his head impatiently at me as much as to say, "*Sit* down!" And after waiting rather uncertainly for a minute or two, I *did* sit down. As I thought to myself, what she had to say to Felix could n't be anything particular, which was no doubt the reason they did n't either of them mind my being by. I 'm not very much of a talker, but I do *love* to be with people, to watch them, to hear 'em talk and to see how they act when things happen; and of course these two being Fee and Alice, I was doubly interested — I soon forgot everything but what they were saying. Still I would n't have stayed for a kingdom had I supposed they did n't know I was there.

"In the way? *Indeed* you are not!" Felix cried warmly, in response to what Alice had said. "Who in this family has ever made you feel that?" He sat up very straight, grasping the arms of his chair; and his tone sounded like "Just you tell me who, and I 'll settle that individual!"

Alice did n't answer immediately; then presently she said, not crossly or complainingly, but in the quietest way, as if merely stating facts: "You spent more of your time with the family before I came. At best you don't care for strangers, and my being here keeps you away from the school-

room, from the drawing-room, — from those who love and value your society. I don't want to think this, but I must. Is n't what I have said true?"

"I — I —" began Felix; then he stopped — he was so embarrassed, so completely taken aback, that he could n't find a word to say. Fee, mind you, who always has plenty of words at his tongue's end! He got scarlet, then the colour went off, leaving two small bright spots on his cheeks; and he looked up at Alice in a shamefaced way that seemed to make her feel badly.

"Oh, dear! Now I 've said something that I should n't," she exclaimed in a tone of distress. "I thought if we talked the matter over we might become friends — I should like that. But I am afraid I have been very blunt; mamma says that is one of my faults. Oh! I *hope* you won't think I meant to take you to task."

Fee raised himself to his feet, and stood resting against the hat-rack table. "I 'm afraid my behaviour is beyond excuse," he said gloomily, then hurriedly, eagerly, with a deprecating gesture as he leaned forward: "I can only very earnestly assure you that I am more than ashamed of my boorishness. If you will be so kind, so generous, as to forgive me and to be friends with me, I shall try in the future to deserve both." I liked the way he said that.

"Why, of course, I will be friends with you, — I 'll be glad to be," answered Alice, frankly. "But," with a touch of shyness that was unusual to her, "I feel as if — perhaps — you know — as if you only say this because of my thoughtless remarks just now."

Fee smiled, — that sweet, winning smile of his that lights up his whole face. "Indeed, I should feel it an honour to have your friendship," he said warmly. "I am only afraid when you get to know me better that you may withdraw it. I wish I were a merry, happy-natured fellow like Phil, but I 'm not," he went on honestly, — I guess it cost him an

effort to say this, for Fee doesn't like to talk of himself; "unfortunately, I am short-tempered and irritable, full of whims and crotchets, — a crank, in fact, as the family could inform you, if they were not too loyal." I thought of Nora! "They've all been so sorry for me and so good to me that I'm afraid between them they have spoiled me. This isn't talk for effect," very earnestly, "but sober truth, which you will surely discover for yourself. Are you sorry of your bargain?" He looked keenly at her.

"Not I," declared Alice, merrily. "And to prove this I am going to claim one of the privileges of our compact, and tell you that I sha'n't allow you to say hard things of my friend." She held up a warning forefinger at him, as she spoke; and they both laughed.

"Then we are friends," Fee said, holding out his hand to her.

"Yes; we are friends," answered Alice, brightly, laying her hand in his.

Just then a key rattled in the lock of the front door, and Phil let himself into the hall. "Oh, good afternoon!" he said, looking pleased to see Alice. "Where's Nannie? I've a message from Mrs. Derwent, — she wants you, Alice and us older ones, to spend this evening with her. The Unsworths will be there too. Just informal, you know. I expect we'll have a jolly evening."

They stood chatting for a few minutes; then Alice remembered a book which she had left in the drawing-room. "Mr. Rose lent it to me," she said; "I think I'll return it to him and then go and get ready for dinner." And with a pleasant nod to the boys, off she went.

"Time for us to be 'ganging' too," Phil said, as Alice turned away. "Fee, I'll take you up this flight by rapid transit."

When he said that I immediately ran down the steps, calling out: "Don't bother about the overcoats and sticks, Phil, I'll carry them."



"'Yes; we are friends,' answered Alice, brightly."

They both looked up in the greatest surprise, — Fee especially. "Where did *you* spring from?" he demanded, rather sharply; while Phil cried, "*L-o-o-k* out for the locomotive! Clear the track!" and rushed Fee up the stairs to the landing, where he set him on his feet. I had to skip pretty lively to get out of the way.

"Why, I 've been in the niche ever since you came in," I said to Fee just as soon as I got the chance — "waiting

to help you upstairs. Don't you remember you told me —"

Felix turned quickly on me. "You don't mean to say that you were up there all the time we were talking," he interrupted, in a tone of voice that made me begin to feel very uncomfortable.

"Of course I was," I answered a little sharply. "Why, *you* told me to wait, — your very self. Alice and you *must* have known I was on the stairs," I was getting real provoked; "for when I went down a step or two and coughed, as you two were talking, to let you know I was there, you both looked up at me, just as plain as possible. And you even nodded your head impatiently at me, as much as to say for me to sit down and wait for you. I would n't have stayed *one* minute if I had supposed you did n't —"

"H'sh! here she comes!" broke in Phil, giving me a poke in the ribs with his elbow, as Alice came along the lower hall from the study. "This conversation 'to be continued in our next.' Catch on, Fee, and we 'll take this second flight in a hurry." And picking up Felix, he sped up the steps as if he did n't feel his weight at all.

But I was n't satisfied; and later on, when Phil was up in the school-room with the girls, I went into Fee's room and had the matter out with him. "Now you understand how it was? — you remember telling me to stay, don't you?" I asked anxiously, when I 'd carefully explained the whole thing to him.

"I do remember now, telling you to wait for me; but that was when I first came in, and I have n't the faintest recollection of looking up or nodding," Fee said. "I 'd no idea — if I thought of it at all — that you would stay there after — eh — Alice" — he usually calls her "Miss Endicott" — "began to talk. I forgot what a Casabianca-like individual you are. I suppose," with a grin, "if I 'd not come upstairs until midnight, you would have remained in the niche

waiting for me — minus dinner, sleep, or any such trifles of life."

I felt awfully hurt! but I didn't say a word; I just got up and started for the door. I'd gone only a step or two, though, when Fee's hand closed round my arm and drew me back, — he had leaned over the low foot-rail of his bed and got hold of me, and now he pulled me down to where I'd been sitting beside him. "Don't let your 'angry passions rise,' Rosebud," he said teasingly. Then with a sudden change of voice, his long, thin fingers closing tightly over mine: "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, chappie. It's all right about your having heard that conversation, as far as I am concerned, for I understand exactly how you came to be on the steps. Why, Jack," smiling up at me from the pillow where he lay, "I have such faith in your truthfulness that, should it come to a question of veracity between us, I would believe you against myself!"

I can't tell you how I felt when Fee said this — I was so astonished and confused! — I blushed till my ears burned. I wanted to tell him that I valued his good opinion, and that I'd try always to deserve it, but I couldn't get a word out. All I could do was to grip his hand hard; but he is very like Nannie in some things, — perhaps he understood without being told.

"Shall I tell Alice about hearing what she said?" I asked presently. I wasn't at all anxious to do it, but I thought perhaps I ought to.

But after a little deliberation Fee said: "No; I think if I were you I would n't say anything to her just now. One of these days — when I know her better — I'll tell her all about it for you."

"All right!" I agreed very willingly; then I added warmly, "Fee, don't you think she's an awfully nice girl?"

"Oh — yes!" Fee answered in such an indifferent, off-hand tone that I was disappointed. But before I could say

anything more, he sat up and put his feet on the floor. "Is that clock right?" he cried, glancing up at the mantelpiece. "Whew! I'll have to hurry or I *shall* be late for dinner! Come, Jack, help me."

The very next afternoon Felix began going in the school-room on his return from business, as he used to do before Alice came. Though all were glad to see him, there were some that *had* to "run" him about it, — you know some people never can let a thing like that pass. He was called Timon of Athens, and asked if he suffered from the difference between the atmosphere upstairs and down, and all that sort of rubbish. But he took all the chaffing in good part; he was in first-rate spirits, and was so merry and agreeable that everybody brightened up and had a jolly time.

But I noticed that there were two people, besides myself, who did n't tease or joke Felix that afternoon. One was Alice, — she *knew* why he came back to the school-room; the other was Nannie, and I 'm pretty sure that Fee had told her the whole story himself.

V.

AN UNEXPECTED RESPONSIBILITY.

TOLD BY JACK.

"JACK," said Nannie, coming into the school-room one Saturday morning, "papa is going out of town presently — to Knoeller's — and he wants you with him."

"Why me?" I asked in surprise. There 's a college at Knoeller's, and I knew papa was going there to look at some rare books which are in the library for the purpose of making notes, and he never takes me with him on such expeditions. It used to be Fee, and then Nannie, and once in a while Phil or Nora, but never Betty nor me. The family all say this is because papa is afraid Betty 'll disgrace him by some hoidenish behaviour, and I by my stupidity. Betty does n't like to hear this, she tosses her head and draws up her long neck to look very dignified; but I take my share quietly, for I know I 'm a dunce, and besides, I get so nervous when I have to do anything for papa that I 'm only too glad to be passed over.

"Why me? Are n't you going?" I asked Nannie; I felt as if there must be a mistake.

She shook her head. "I have some writing to do for papa that must be finished to-day," she said; "the boys — Phil and Felix — are down-town, you know; Nora, Betty, and Alice have an engagement with Mrs. Derwent, and of course the younger children are out of the question; so there 's only you, Jack, to go with papa."

"Bet you I could do it as well as Jack, and better too," cried out Paul, — just like his impudence! He was perched

up at the table with a lot of old Centurys and Harper's Magazines spread out before him. "Tell papa to take me, Nannie, — there 'll be sure to be a jolly ride from the station to the college!"

"I don't like you to talk slang, Judge, — it is n't nice," said Nannie. I took no notice of his remark. "Papa knows best who should go with him, and he says Jack. Come, Jackie, better get ready; papa will soon be starting." She guessed that I did n't want to go.

Paul chuckled. "Now here 's something *very* curious!" he drawled, turning over a leaf of his magazine. "It 's entitled — um — eh — 'A Tragic Ride,' and it 's got pictures. First picture: A tall, thin gentleman, with glasses on, and a long, lean boy starting out, riding in a buggy, drawn by a horse which for bones must be first cousin to Don Quixote's nag 'Rosinante.' Gentleman and boy appear — happy! horse crawls along and looks — *un*happy! Second picture: Very steep hill, at side of it a precipice — beyond it the — — eh — the eh — oh! farmyard where Rosinante's first cousin's dinner is waiting for 'im. He is tearing down the hill two-forty, determined to leap that precipice and get that feed *quick*, or — die! Gentleman and boy are scared 'most *to* death — and hollering like mad. Third picture: Foot of precipice," he dropped his voice to a tragic whisper, and rolled his eyes at me — "crowds of people with brooms," he shook his head mournfully, "*sweeping* up the scattered remains of the tall gentleman, the long lean boy, the buggy, *and* Rosinante's cousin! Yah! yah!"

"I do believe you 've made that up — there is n't a line of it in the magazine. Why, Judge!" exclaimed Kathie, in wondering admiration, as she peeped over his shoulder; while Alan enjoyed Paul's wit so much that he fell off the sofa and rolled on the floor in a paroxysm of laughter.

"You are a silly little boy," Nannie said; but she smiled.

Mädel ran up to me and slipped her plump little hand

into mine. "Don't go, Jack," she pleaded; "don't you and papa go if that horrid old horse is going to run away with you."

"Don't worry, Mädel," I said, patting her head, — she 's a dear little thing! "You must n't believe all the rubbish that Paul talks." And I left the room before that young man had a chance to put in another remark. Judge is a bright boy — I think he is going to be clever by and by — but we 've all laughed at his funny speeches until now he quite often gets beyond himself. I would just like to have seen myself at his age making the fun of Phil and Felix that he does of me! I would never have thought of such a thing. Betty would have squelched Mr. Paul if she had been there, — she pitches into me herself sometimes, — but she 'll not let the others do it.

"Look after papa, Jack," Nannie whispered, as she was seeing us off. "Remind him to put on his overcoat when he is leaving the college, or he 'll forget it, and see that he does n't sit in a draught. And above all things, dear, don't get nervous, — I know that you can easily do all that he requires, and well too." Then she kissed me, and squeezed my fingers to give me a little confidence.

It 's quite a ride to Knoeller's, but I don't think papa and I spoke more than twice all the way up. I did n't mind this, as the car was pretty full, and I amused myself looking at the people and making up things about them. Meanwhile papa sat deep in thought; I suppose he was thinking of the book that he is starting in to write. We don't know the title of it yet, but Nannie told us the other day that it was to be about some more of the ancients. It seems that the people who have read his other book like it so well that they 've asked papa to write something more. You may remember I told you when the Fetich was finished. Well, after that we all supposed it would soon be published; but, as Betty says, "we reckoned without papa." We think that, perhaps, from work-

ing over it for all those years he 'd got so fond of the book that he hated to part with it, for it was the longest while before the History came out."

First of all, papa had to go carefully over every page, verifying, changing, and rewriting, and that took a good deal of time. At last Mr. Erveng persuaded him that everything was in order, and got him to give up the manuscript. After that, bundles of proofs began to arrive, and then came the trouble; when papa saw his work in type, he got dreadfully discouraged over it, said it was n't worth printing, that he would n't let any such "rubbish" go out under his name, and started in to *rewrite* more than half of it!

When papa makes up his mind to a certain thing there 's no moving him from it; and so the people who had bought the Fetich soon found out. It was no use their writing him letters, or informing him that the book was advertised to appear at a stated date, or Mr. Erveng and Max and some other learned people who 'd read it telling him that the History was the most accurate and scholarly work of its kind. Papa had made up his mind that parts of it should be rewritten, and rewritten they were. And when the last chapter, the last page had been gone over, Nannie and Fee both think that he would like to have started in from the beginning and rewritten the *whole* thing. But Mr. Erveng and Mr. Van Buren fairly pounced on the pages, hurried them off to Boston, and rushed the book through.

In the interval between the carrying off of the proofs and the appearance of the bound volumes, papa was all upset, — "just lost," nurse called it. He wandered aimlessly about the house — a thing that usually he never does — and sat in his chair in the study with the saddest, almost hopeless, expression on his face. Nannie let everything else go, and stayed with him the whole time, reading and talking to him, — we were all worried for fear he 'd get ill again. But he cheered up when the books came; and — what do you

think? — sat right down and began to make more corrections and changes! The set on his book-shelves are just as they came from the printers, but the set which lie on his desk are marked and changed in every direction, the margins are crowded with notes, and between the leaves are pages and pages of new material that is to be included in the next edition.

It was some time before he would undertake to write this new book, but now he 's interested and seems quite full of it.

Except for a slight flurry, we 'd not had any snow in the city, but at Knoeller's we found the ground covered with it, — the trees looked lovely in their shining white mantle. There were no stages or carriages standing about, as at most stations, and we had to go to several places before we could get any kind of a conveyance to take us to the college. At last, though, we found something, — a sleigh that looked as if it might have come out of the ark. It was four-seated, with a wonderfully high curved front piece, that turned up almost against the front seats, which were away up in the air, and those at the back were low and so slanting — backward — that they were very uncomfortable to sit in. Sometime in the dim past perhaps it had been a very gay affair, but now the gilt was all tarnished, the runners were rusted, and the only remains of upholstery were one or two frayed strips of red material that still hung on to the back of the sleigh; old horse-blankets rolled up took the place of cushions. The horse that went with this was a round, sleepy-looking animal, rough-coated and holding his head on a straight line with his body.

"Here 's yer hoss 'n' yer sleigh," said the man who owned this turnout, "but you 'll have to drive yourself. I ain't got no time to go with you, nor nobody to send."

Of course, while we 're at the cottage summers, we have our donkey, G. W. L. Spry, and our old horse Pegasus, but neither papa nor I drive them very often; papa prefers to

walk, except to and from the station, and then one of us takes the lines, and what with Phil and Betty and the younger children always ready to fill the office, I don't often get the chance to be driver. So when papa turned to me with a rather disturbed expression, and asked, "Can you drive?" I got nervous and hesitated. "I — I — guess so," I said. I was *so* sorry afterward that I had n't boldly undertaken to do it; I might have saved myself a long, cold tramp —

"We want no guessing in this matter," papa said decidedly. "Get in the back seat; I will drive."

"The college ain't hard to find," remarked the owner of the sleigh, "an'," with a grin, "there ain't no call to be afeared o' this beast, he ain't eggsac'ly a racer. Jest keep straight ahead till you come to the top o' the long hill, then tu'n to yer right an' go on till you see the buildin's."

Papa took his seat in front; he had some trouble getting his long legs into that narrow space, and he did look comical perched up in the air, — had Betty or any of the others been with us, I should certainly have had to laugh; then I got in behind, and off we started.

The weather was cold but fine, and once out of the village the scenery was lovely. I would have enjoyed the drive had n't I felt as if I might slide out of the sleigh at any moment. Going up an incline, I hung on to the front seat, — I could barely reach the top without standing up, — and going down I had to brace my knees against it to save myself from falling forward on papa. We kept going up and down hills that all seemed about the same length, and at last I began to wonder if it was n't time for us to come to the "long hill" and so be able to turn off to the college. But papa seemed to have no doubts about the way, — sitting up very straight, and without a word. Once, when we were nearly at the top of one of the hills, I leaned forward and said: "Papa, perhaps this is the long hill. Is n't that road to the right the one we should take now?" But he made

no answer, and I thought perhaps he did n't like my reminding him, so I kept quiet.

Everything was very still, the horse wore no bells, and the only sound was the squeaking of the runners on the snow. By and by I thought of something I 'd been reading the evening before, and began making up an ending to it, — I often do that, and once in a while I hit it off with the author. This was an exciting story of an Arctic expedition, and I 'd just rescued the hero from being crushed to death between two icebergs, when — suddenly the horse gave a violent start forward, and, quick as a flash ! away I went over the back of the sleigh. I cut a complete somersault backward, and landed face downward in the middle of a snowdrift !

Well, to say I was surprised does n't begin to express it. I was so perfectly astonished that it took me a few minutes just to get my senses together and realise what had happened. Then, for I was n't in the least hurt, I jumped up and ran after the sleigh, shouting as loudly as I could, "Papa ! papa ! stop — *stop !*"

But I might as well have spared my breath. The horse, which 'd been simply crawling all the rest of the way, had now started in at a round pace, and presently — for one brief moment — I saw the sleigh, papa's figure, and his pointed fur cap in full relief against the sky ; then they disappeared over the brow of the hill, and I was left alone.

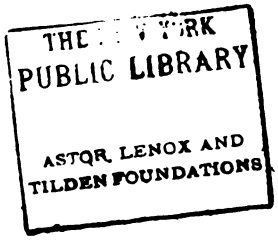
I can tell you I felt anything but happy. At first I did n't know whether to go on — after papa — or back to the village. But when I reached the top of the hill and saw that the only buildings within sight which could possibly be the college lay away behind me, near the village, — then I knew papa had gone miles out of his way and was going still farther, — he was now just a small black object on the white road. Then I turned and tramped back to the station.

It took me a good while to get there, the walking was so bad, — slippery, and now and then through drifts that came



"'Jest keep straight ahead till you come to the top o' the long hill.'"




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up to my knees, — but at last I reached the village. And as I got inside the door of the station — I thought I 'd go in there and dry my feet at the stove — who should come driving up but papa! I dashed out and ran to the horse's head, for fear he might start off again, calling out as I went, "Oh, papa, I 'm so glad to see you!"

Papa leaned forward and looked at me in the greatest surprise. "Why — why, where did you come from?" he asked, then glancing behind and around him with an air of bewilderment. "I — I thought you were in the back seat. Have I *missed* the college?"

Then I told him. He looked very much annoyed. "Why did you not make yourself heard when you suspected that I was going out of my way?" he asked sharply; then, with a sigh, hardly listening to my explanation, "I should have brought Nannie. Too bad! I really need those notes."

"Could n't we go to the college now? Is n't there time?" I said eagerly. "I know the way now, — I could drive." But papa ignored my offer, though he did conclude to try again for the college.

By this time the owner of the sleigh had come up; he put on a broad grin when he heard our story. "Missed the college!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Well, I swow! Why, it 's as easy to find as rollin' off a log. You 've took the road what runs right round the village. No, I ain't got no time to drive you meself, but I 'll let my boy Johnnie go — he 's to home now. Know the way? I should think *he* did. Hey, Johnnie!"

I felt really mortified when I saw that Johnnie was a little chap, not more than ten years old. But papa did n't seem to mind at all; he was thinking of his notes, you see.

While papa was getting down from the front perch to take his seat at the back with me, the owner of the sleigh edged up to me. "Say," he remarked in a confidential undertone, "queer customer — ain't he?" with a jerk of his

head in papa's direction. "Off?" He tapped his forehead significantly.

"No, indeed!" I fired up. "He's an *awfully* clever man, — Greek and Latin and Hebrew and all that. And he writes books — "

"O-oh, he does, eh!" the man said, wagging his head. He stroked the long scant beard that grew from under his chin, and looked curiously at papa. Then papa got in, and we made our second start.

There was no mishap this time. I noticed that papa clung on to the front seat just as much as ever I did. The people at the college were very polite and kind; and I managed to get down all the notes that were wanted. I got so nervous, though, that I almost forgot how to spell English words, to say nothing of Latin and Greek; but Nannie and Felix helped me get the whole thing into shape before papa needed it.

We reached home about half-past five; papa went straight to his study, and I ran upstairs. I had made up my mind, though, that only Nannie and Betty should hear of our mis-adventure; I did n't want Paul to get hold of it.

As I reached the second floor Nonie came out of her room; she looked so good-natured and excited that I knew at once something nice had happened.

"Have you heard about Felix?" she said, before I had time to ask anything. "He is to plead in court on Wednesday!"

"*No!* truly?" I cried out breathlessly, — we had all been just longing for that. "How 'd it happen? Whose case is it?"

"Go on upstairs and you 'll hear," she said, smiling. "I suppose I should have let Fee tell it; but I could n't resist the opportunity."

"You 've not told me any of the particulars," I called back to her; I was already up the next flight of steps.

"Hullo! here's Jack," sung out Alan, as I got inside the school-room door. And then everybody began telling me the news at the same time. I could only catch disjointed bits of sentences here and there from the babel of voices — "Jermyn *versus* Duff" — "Could n't possibly get here" — "Wednesday" — "Big opportunity" — "Max" — "Supreme Court!" And there I was, dying to hear the whole thing. I just lost patience. "How can I make out what you are saying when you are all talking at once?" I shouted, shaking my arms at them.

"Order! o-r-*der!* ladies and gentlemen, I *will* have order!" roared Phil, hammering on the school-room table with one of Betty's dumb-bells, — mind you, he 'd been making as big a row as anybody! Alice was rocking herself to and fro in her chair and laughing, with her hand on her side.

"The good news belongs to Fee; do every one else keep still and let him tell it," cried Nannie, as soon as she could make her voice heard. Then things quieted down, and everybody looked expectantly at Felix, though all but I had heard the whole story several times over.

Fee was seated in our old school-room rocker, his arms extended on its broad, flat side-pieces. He looked elated, his cheeks were flushed; and his eyes were shining through his glasses as he gazed up at me. "Well," he said, the corners of his mouth curving upward with enjoyment, "there is n't a very great deal to tell. You know Max started for Denver last Tuesday to be gone two weeks. Before he left he arranged everything as far as he could so that the rest of us in the office could carry on matters during his absence. This Jermyn *versus* Duff suit he did n't expect to come up for trial till the end of the month, and here to-day we received notice that it 's on for Wednesday; and we could n't get it postponed. Well, that knocked us all to pieces for a while, for it 's an important case — there 's a

lot of money as well as principle involved, and we all know Max has set his heart on gaining it. Then Saunders, who takes the head of affairs when Max is away, wired Max explaining things and asking for orders — you see we were sure he could n't get here in time, but we wanted to know into whose hands to put the matter. Of course Max was surprised, and for a while there telegrams flew pretty lively between Denver City and our office. The last one reached us this afternoon about four o'clock; it said — "

"Oh, read it! read it!" interrupted half a dozen voices.

Fee's hand went to his breast pocket, then he hesitated and looked deprecatingly at Alice. "You have heard this story three or four times already," he said; "you 'll get sick of it."

"Indeed, I won't!" she protested warmly, "I 'm just as interested! Do read the telegram."

So Fee took the telegram from out the wallet where he keeps his important papers, and, opening it, read slowly and impressively: "'F. Saunders, 120 Broadway, New York City. Put law case of Jermyn *versus* Duff and all proceedings connected therewith into the hands of —'" Fee looked up at me with a broad smile — and —

"'Felix W. Rose'!" finished the family for him with one voice.

"G-*ee!* hurray!" I shouted. I was so worked up that I swung myself on to the table and sat there hugging my knee; when I get excited over anything I often catch myself doing that. "Do go on," I begged.

"Well, that 's really about all there is to it," Fee said. "Of course, the fellows in the office are astounded that Max should have put such an important case into my inexperienced hands; and I fancy that some of them are looking for a failure. But it 's not going to be a failure if *I* can help it."

"A failure! no, indeed!" cried several of us, positively.

"And I *couldn't* have a better opportunity than this to begin," went on Fee, glancing round at us, sure of his audience. "I prepared the case for Max, so I know it from end to end; and that is a big item in my favour. Of course, I realise this is a tremendous responsibility for me; but I'm not going to let it overwhelm me. The best way of showing Max that I appreciate his kindness is to go in and win — and I shall strain every nerve to do it."

"What is the lawsuit about?" asked Alice. "Who is Jermyn, and who is Duff?"

"Well, it's my conviction that Duff is a deeply, darkly dyed rascal," answered Felix, looking pleased at her interest. "About fifteen or eighteen years ago, Duff and Jermyn bought some land together, and for a long time — up to the time Jermyn died — it was worth very little. Within a year or two, however, the town in which the property lies has taken a start, and grown by leaps, and there's a big 'boom' there in real estate. Of course, the land is now worth a good deal; and Duff insists that he owns it all. He won't acknowledge the claim made by Jermyn's widow and children, though he knows how wretchedly poor they are, and that they are entitled to a full half of the property. Now this suit is to prove their legal right, and so force him to disgorge some of his ill-gotten gains. That's really the situation in a nutshell. Duff is rich and unscrupulous; you may be sure he and his lawyers will not leave one stone unturned to win. But perhaps, after all, he won't win. He most certainly won't if *I* can help it. I *must* win that suit!" He brought his hand down emphatically on the broad arm of the chair; then the next minute turned and looked wistfully at Phil and Nannie. "Don't you suppose I'm equal to carrying it through? What do you think?" he asked anxiously.

A simultaneous shout of "We *know* you'll win it!" answered him; and Nannie bent down and kissed her twin on the tip of his ear.

"Win it?" cried Phil. "Well, I wish I were as sure of being the President some day. Of *course* you 'll win it, and — hark ye! hark ye! friends," waving his long arms at us, "while I predict it — not only this suit, but others and others still, until one day we shall be able to speak of — " he drew himself up and assumed a most pompous tone and air — "of 'our distinguished brother, Judge Rose'! It 's coming, old man, sure! I see it in your eye."

"Oh, I don't know about *such* a height," began Felix, modestly. But Nora cut short his remarks.

"Papa is asking for you, Nannie," she said, coming in almost breathless from running up the steps. "I don't like to break up a pleasant party," she added, "but, good people, do you know it is getting very near dinner-time? Come, Alice, come, Betty, let us go down."

"Yes, and I must go tell the news to the *pater*," put in Fee.

"Allow me the extraordinary felicity of assisting his honour the — in prospective — Judge of the Supreme Court to the lower regions," cried Phil. Rushing over, he made a low salaam; and crooking his elbow, presented it to Felix with an air of the profoundest respect that set us off laughing.

Then, as Fee got up and took his arm, declaring, with a broad grin, "You *are* the greatest goose!" Phil shouted, "Guard of honour, fall into line."

We Roses knew what he meant, and, with a great deal of giggling, everybody flew to their places — Nannie and Alice, too, and even Nora — making two lines; and down the middle went our boys, Phil holding his head very high and putting on all sorts of airs.

"You 've forgotten your cane," shouted Judge, making a dive for it.

But with a very grand motion Felix waved him back. "Don't speak to me about canes or crutches to-day," he said loftily. "There are times when mind triumphs over

matter, — this is one of them." And, depending only on Phil's strong arm for support, he walked slowly down the aisle we had made. For years he had not been able to do such a thing!

We watched him in breathless silence; then Betty darted out of the line and shut the school-room door hard. "I *must* scream," she declared, "or something will happen to me!"

Then Nannie flew out and hugged Fee; and then we cheered, — not so loudly as we 'd have liked, on account of papa, but with our hearts in it, — and stood beating time with our hands and feet until Phil and Felix had disappeared down the attic steps.

VI.

THE TRIAL.

TOLD BY JACK.

OF course, having so little time before the trial, Fee was dreadfully busy all Monday and Tuesday. He had to get everything in order, to see about his witnesses, and to post himself thoroughly on all, even the very smallest, details of the case. He came home each afternoon with black rings round his eyes, and that strained expression in his face that used to be there so often during his college days.

But he would n't listen to it that he was tired. "Tired already, and the suit not yet opened!" he exclaimed, when one of us said something to him about it. "Well, that would be a fine beginning! No, I'm not tired, and I am not going to be — until it is over. And I 'll tell you all now, while I think of it," glancing around at us, "no matter what I do or how I look, *don't* keep talking about it to me or nagging me about my health. For the next few days I want — I *intend*," with an impatient gesture, "to forget that I am not as strong as every other man."

"Still, what good will the glory be, if you get ill?" commenced Nora; but Phil interrupted. "All right, your honour! to hear is to obey," he declared. And leaning forward, Nannie with a bright smile patted her twin's hand, and gave a little comprehensive nod of her head.

It was well Fee made this stipulation, for that week he certainly taxed his strength in a way that would otherwise have brought the whole family down on him. But, as it was,

all we could do was to keep quiet and just watch for chances to help him. Even Nora, though she would *look* all sorts of remonstrances, said nothing. While he was in the house, Nannie hovered about him, on the alert, in that dear, sweet way of hers, to do everything for him that she could; and as for Phil — well, Betty and I are sure that Fee could never have accomplished what he did that week if it had n't been for Phil.

He got away from business and just devoted himself to Fee, going to the office with him, and doing any of the outside work that he could, and then staying near during the trial. And, whether from the knowledge of Phil's strength close at hand if needed, or because he was so excited, I don't know; but Felix braced up and did things that he had n't done for years, such as frequently discarding his crutch, and even trying to stand without the support of his cane.

Of course we were all wild to attend the trial; but when Fee found that it would very likely last three days, he begged that we would come on the last day — "to see me win or to condole with me," he said. So we had to pocket our disappointment and wait for Friday; only papa dropping into the court every afternoon about the time that he knew the case would be on. Afterwards we heard that old Mr. Van Buren — he used to be a lawyer — and Dr. Gordon and Murray Unsworth were there, too, though Fee did n't know it at the time.

Of course, everybody was very anxious, but the girls did their best to keep things cheerful. In the mornings there 'd be a merry group in the hall to see the boys off, and afternoons — well, just as soon as Phil's key rattled in the lock of that front door, it was amazing how the different members of the family appeared from drawing-room, basement, and hall, as if by magic. The "kids" were well to the front, you may be sure, — Judge and Kathie would n't have missed such an occasion for anything! And then we 'd all escort Phil and

Felix to the school-room and hover round them until we had heard what had taken place that day.

Phil gave us glowing accounts of the cool way in which Fee "handled the witnesses," as he expressed it. "Why, you 'd think he was an 'old stager' at it. With all his experience I 'm sure Max could n't do better," he declared. "To-day one of Duff's best witnesses weakened most beautifully — for us — and so far things look as if they were going *just* as we 'd like to have 'em."

And though Fee looked very worn and tired, he was in splendid spirits, and seemed perfectly confident of his ability to carry the case through — until Thursday night. That afternoon, when he got home, he said: "I can see pretty well how things are going; the case will be decided to-morrow afternoon, so now I 'll start in on my speech, and get that ready as far as I can. I shall try to commit it to memory, and then," with a glance at us, half merry, half appealing, "if you people don't mind being victimized, I 'd like to get it off before you. It would be a kind of preparation for the ordeal to-morrow. A good, well-worked-up speech can have a tremendous influence on the decision of a case. Bentley [he was Duff's lawyer] is a pretty fluent speaker; and this will be my 'maiden effort,' which must be my excuse for bothering you." He meant that last for Alice, — he knew well enough *we* 'd be only too delighted to listen to him. And I think she guessed that, for she joined in very earnestly when we assured Fee that we would like to hear the speech, — not once, but as many times as he pleased.

"Go over and over it," urged Phil, "so as to be perfectly familiar with every sentence, and be able to rattle the whole thing off in fine style to-morrow. Should nature assert her right, and sleep overcome the others, *I* at least will be faithful — say, that 's a *fine* sentence, eh? I 'll lend thee mine ears, sir knight, until the smallest of the wee sma' hours of

the morning. Can brotherly affection do more? If so, name it!" — and he struck a tragic attitude.

Then Felix went down to his room and shut himself in to write his speech. Nan went with him, and lingered awhile, getting his paper and pens and all that in order; then — Phil and I saw it from our door — as she passed behind Fee's chair, she slipped an arm round his neck and rubbed her cheek softly against his, murmuring something. Fee put up his hand and pressed her face close to his for a minute; then Nannie went out, and he locked the door.

You can't think what an excited, uncomfortable set of people we all were that evening. The younger children haunted the halls and hung around the steps, talking in loud whispers — because Fee had asked for the house to be kept quiet — until Nannie and Nurse, between driving and coaxing, got 'em off to bed. The girls declared it was no use trying to stay downstairs and do the usual things; so Alice, Nora, and Betty had gone up to the school-room with Rollie Van Buren and Murray Unsworth, and were playing quiet games to pass the time until they should hear the speech.

Miss Marston called through the closed door to offer Felix, "just as a guide," an odd volume of "Speeches of Lord Erskine," which she happened to have among her treasures; and papa sent up to tell him that he was n't going to the Archæological Society that evening and would give him any assistance in his power. Phil and I were in our room; I was trying to get interested in a story which at any other time I 'd have found first-rate, and Phil sat looking over the speeches of Webster that Fee admires most. He had pulled his chair close by our door, — which is right next to Fee's, — and as he whisked over the leaves of the book, he kept making remarks. "H'm! talk about your Webster! seems to me this is pretty dry stuff." "No regard for time — had he? Should think the judge would have been *under* the bench — sound asleep — instead of on it at the end of *this* speech;"

winding up with a most emphatic "I 'm positive that Felix can do better than these," as he tossed the volume on our bed, and then yawned.

About ten o'clock Nannie came in with a little tray in her hand; she was supposed to be in the school-room with the other girls, but instead had been sitting on the attic stairs or in our room, or hovering about the hall and Fee's door. There was an anxious look on her dear face. "I 've brought Fee up a cup of hot *bouillon*," she said. "He scarcely touched a mouthful at the early dinner nurse got him; and to-morrow will be a hard day, — I 'm going to coax him to take this."

"Seems as if he had been locked up in there for an age," remarked Phil, smothering another yawn. "Is n't it time he had something to read to us?"

"I 'll see," answered Nan, turning to go out.

Just then Fee's door opened, and he came into our room, leaning on his cane. "Here 's a cup of nice, hot *bouillon*, Fee," commenced Nannie, holding it out to him; I threw down my book, and Phil jumped to his feet, exclaiming: "We were just talking about you, old chappie. Come in, come in and take a seat — "

Then Nannie cried out sharply, "Oh, twinnie! *what* is it?" for we all felt that something was wrong.

Fee was deadly pale, and in his eyes was a most mournful, almost despairing expression. There was a queer — well, "subdued" is the only word I can think of to express it — air about him, that was n't a bit like himself. He came over and sat on the edge of Phil's bed, then he answered us. "I can't do it," he said quietly; his voice was dull, heavy. "I 've tried — I 've been trying all those hours in there, and I have failed."

"You mean that you *can't* write your speech?" cried Phil, in amazement.

"Yes," said Fee, in the same dull tone, with a slow nod

of his head. "I have n't been idle — I 've worked harder than ever in all my life — but when I came to read it over 't was nothing — but *rubbish.* And the harder I tried to improve it the worse I did — until I got in a state where I actually forgot the meaning of the law phrases, — the very value of the words I was using; then I thought 't was time to stop. And I came in to tell you. *Is n't* it a pity!" he looked from one to the other of us with those big, despairing eyes; "such an opportunity! And I was so sure I could make the most of it. You see, I was conceited — Max will be disappointed. There is n't time now to telegraph him — I must let one of the fellows in the office finish the case. How some of them will crow —"

"Oh, but, Felix, this is nonsense!" cried Phil, roughly; laying his hand on Fee's shoulder, he gave him a little shake. "A fellow that 's done all you have is n't to be floored by his first speech in court. 'T is n't conceit troubles you, — you 're too modest, that 's what 's the matter. Where is what you 've written? We 'll fix it up. Come, *rouse* up!"

"It 's in the waste-basket, where it belongs — in atoms," answered Felix. "I know its worth, or rather worthlessness;" he put his hand wearily to his forehead.

"That 's all bosh!" cried Phil, impatiently. He thinks Fee is so clever that he hates to hear him depreciate himself; and in fact we none of us like it.

Nannie had been standing silently by, just looking earnestly at Fee; but now she went swiftly to his side, and putting her arms around him, drew his head down on her shoulder; making a sign at the same time to Phil to be quiet. "Dear heart!" she said tenderly, snuggling her chin against his forehead, "you are over-tired and nervous — worn out, in fact, — that is the trouble. Your forehead is *so* hot and your hands are like ice — I suppose your feet are too. Come, let us get you to bed, dear; things will look very

different to-morrow — after a good night's rest. Never mind about the lawsuit to-night."

"I *am* tired," Fee said wearily; "and awfully discouraged, which is worse. But," rousing up, "I should write to Saunders now, asking him to take charge — I should really go and see him, to explain, for he knows nothing of the case —"

"Not to-night, dear," Nannie said soothingly; "to-morrow morning, if you still wish it, Phil will go round early to Mr. Saunders for you — or you could go yourself, but not to-night. Now come into your own room."

While he was going in with Phil — Phil had almost to lift him along — Nannie whispered to me to run downstairs and fill the hot-water bottles. "Do it quietly, Jack," she said, "so no one need know." And I did.

"Take Fee's waste-basket into your room," she said next, in an undertone, as she took the bottles from me, "and by and by we 'll try to put that speech together." So I did that too.

When Fee was settled for the night — with a cloth wet in ice-water on his head and hot bottles at his feet, Nannie ran upstairs and sent the visitors home, and the girls off to their own rooms. "It is too late to have the speech to-night, and Fee is so tired that I have persuaded him to go to bed. I am sorry you have all had to wait so long," she said, in that calm, quiet way of hers. Of course they were disappointed; but I don't think any of them suspected how utterly used up Fee was; though Betty must have noticed that Nannie did n't come to bed until very late. For we were busy up in our room.

As soon as Nannie was sure that Felix was asleep, she came in to us, and we began patching together the torn bits of his speech. It was n't easy, I can tell you; the pieces were so small, and ragged on the edges — as if he had torn them recklessly apart — and such hard shapes

to fit in. It required the greatest patience, and no end of time. Fortunately, Fee had only written on one side of the sheets; but, on the other hand, they were n't numbered, and there were so many beginnings of the speech — started after he 'd got discouraged with the first — that for a while we were puzzled to know which was the right one. So we pieced them all out, and at last got the whole thing into a shape where the pages seemed to connect with some sense. Then Nannie started in to read it through. We felt that she was the proper person to do this, on account of her experience with papa's work, and besides that, though she never "shows off" or makes any fuss over it, Nannie is an awfully clever girl, and, as Fee often says, "the keenest kind of a critic." So we were sure that she 'd know if Fee's speech was worth anything, and would say so honestly. But, my! how long the time seemed while she was reading! We realised how much depended on that speech, — how utterly broken down and mortified Fee would be (in fact, all of us) to have failed in this, his very first case. With his disposition, success makes him equal to anything, while failure knocks him right over and takes all the courage out of him. By my own anxiety, I knew how Phil and Nannie felt.

Nan's face was pale, and there was an eager, intense look on it as her eyes glanced rapidly from line to line, but she did n't say a word. After staring her almost out of countenance, Phil got restless, and going over to the windows stood there, first at one, then at the other, rattling the things in his pockets, and softly whistling something that had no tune at all.

Well, he kept that up until I felt as if I 'd *have* to ask him to stop — I guess I was nervous too. I had just concluded to get up from my chair and go speak to him, when Nannie laid down the manuscript and turned to us.

"Well?" Phil and I called out, in the same eager, breathless whisper, starting forward.

The colour came rushing to Nan's cheeks, her eyes were alight. "Boys," she said slowly, impressively, with *such* a glad ring in her voice, "it is a splendid speech! *splendid!* — strong, clear, logical, eloquent! *Fine!* The poor fellow was so tired, so nervous and over-anxious, that he could not appreciate the value of his own work. *Dear* old twinnie!"

"Thank God!" came from my lips involuntarily, and I know Phil felt so, too, by the look he gave me; but he is n't one to speak out such things. Instead he shouted, under his breath, "*Hoop*-de-doodle-do!" and, snatching me by the waist, whirled me round the room.

When we got back to the table there was Nannie, with the tears pouring down her cheeks. "It — it 's for joy — don't mind me," she said, trying to smile at us. "I know it is silly — but I can't help it."

"Poor little Nancy Lee!" cried Phil, hugging her, and then wiping away her tears with his big handkerchief. "You are all tired out too. Just number these pages for me, — you know the order in which they should come, — then you trot off to bed, and Jack and I will finish up here. Of course Fee can't use such patched-up looking sheets, so I 'm going to copy out the speech nicely for him. Then I have a plan — I think it is fine. Listen —"

Nannie approved of his plan; and after going carefully over the speech with us, and making everything very plain, she said good-night — good-morning it should have been — and went downstairs to her own room.

It was a good deal later when Phil and I got to bed; but we did n't mind one bit, for the speech was all nicely copied off in Phil's best writing; and, as Phil expressed it after a last visit to Fee's room, "his honour was sleeping as sweetly as a babby."

Nannie would n't let any one disturb Felix until quite late the next morning; he had just waked up a few moments before I came in his room with his breakfast. "You



"' Boys,' she said slowly, impressively, 'it is a splendid speech!'"



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should n't have let me sleep so late," he was saying to Nannie, in a very languid tone. "I ought to have been up hours ago and off to Saunders, explaining things and — and — putting the case in his hands. By now he 's on his way down town; I 'll have to see him at the office, and I did n't want to do that. Those fellows — " He stopped abruptly and turned his head away, crooking his arm over his eyes. "I *can't* believe that I 've failed!" we heard him say, as if to himself.

Nannie and I looked at each other; then she sat down on the edge of Fee's bed, and drew the arm from before his eyes, holding his hand between her two. "Fee dear," she said gently, "don't you feel more encouraged to go on with the case to-day? You know it so thoroughly, perhaps this afternoon you could make a short speech — I mean without writing one. Could n't you?" Of course she only said this to try him. But her face grew anxious when he said, looking up at her in a sad, shamed way: "I *could n't*, Nan. I seem to have lost my grip on the whole thing. I have n't the courage to face that court when I know that my feeble utterances may just ruin the case."

"But think of all you did in college," she urged. "This is n't nearly so difficult."

"I know it," he said gloomily. "But then I was sure of what I had to say and do; now I feel incompetent."

"Oh, Fee!" exclaimed Nannie and I together, reproachfully.

But just then the door flew open, and in came Phil; he did n't walk in, he just bounced, he was in such a hurry, and his face was beaming. "Hurrah!" he cried out, waving something over his head. "Top o' the morning to your honour! You 're a nice one to give us such a scare last night," he went on gaily, coming nearer; "talking about failure and giving up the case and all that rubbish, when you 'd just written a speech like *that!*" thrusting the roll

into Fee's astonished hands. "Why, Mr. Van says it 's as fine a piece of oratory as he or any old vet. of a lawyer could get up. He says that you have made some *telling* points; and he knows what he is talking about, for he 's attended the trial straight through since it opened. He says it is a *fine* speech, but no more than he expected from *you*."

Fee was sitting up in bed now, looking bewildered.

"Mr. Van — my speech? What are you getting at?" he asked sharply. "Is this a practical joke? The speech I tried to write last night is in pieces in that waste-basket," pointing to where I had replaced it before he was awake.

"*Is* it?" laughed Phil; turning the basket upside down, he beat it on the floor to show its emptiness. Then plumping himself down on the side of the bed, he began to explain — you may be sure Nannie and I did some talking too.

By the time we got through Felix looked like another person, or, to be more correct, just like himself, — bright, eager, alert, full of courage.

"And you mean to say that Mr. Van Buren thinks this is a good speech? Honour bright? *I* thought it was utter rubbish."

"Honour bright!" answered Phil.

"Well, then, I 'm all right, — I can carry that case through," Fee said; he spoke out with a decision that lifted a load of anxiety from our hearts. Then he looked round at us. "But I could never have done it without you three," he said, and the quiver in his voice told us how much he felt. "Twinnie! you are *always* doing for me," he said; he drew Nan to him and kissed her, and held out a hand to Phil and me.

"Don't speak of it, — don't mention it, I beg," exclaimed Phil, airily. "But I *will* mention that it is time your honour arose."

"That 's so," agreed Felix, with a startled glance at the clock. "Nan, you 'd better flit, and Phil and Jack will help me dress. Then to commit this old speech to memory."

He was in high spirits the rest of the morning, and talked a good deal; though I could see he was nervous, still it was a very different kind of nervousness from that of the night before.

The whole family crowded in the hall to wish him success and see him off. In the babel of voices — as usual, we were all talking at once — I heard Fee say to Alice as he shook hands with her, "And have I your good wishes for my success?"

"Indeed, you have!" she exclaimed warmly; then, looking up at him in a shy sort of way, "Did you not know I would be interested in the success of *my friend?*"

"Thank you," Fee said, with his quick, bright smile, adding hurriedly, "Sit where I can see you — with Nannie." She only gave a little nod, but I had a feeling it meant yes.

The next minute Phil came up with almost the same request. "Do sit up front, where a person can see you," he urged. "I 'll try and look out for you; but if anything should prevent my being on hand, please don't be lost to sight in one of those back benches."

"I 'll see — whatever the others decide," she answered, turning her head away as she spoke, to look for Nannie.

Then Betty had something to say about it. "Felix," she called loudly, "had n't we better take the back seats in court? There is a family likeness between us all, you know; and there 's such a cavalcade of us — even the 'kiddies' are going. People will think your family name is legion."

"No, no, *no!*" Felix replied vehemently. "No matter how many there are, I want you all — every one — well in the front, where I can see you. Why," throwing out his hand impatiently, "I look to you all for the inspiration to

carry me through the afternoon, and how can I get that if you 're out of sight?"

There was a last good-bye to Nannie; then he and Phil were off.

When we got to the court-house that afternoon a good many people were already there; but Phil was waiting, and he found seats for us near together, well up — in almost the front rows; his place, though, was over on the side, and nearer to Fee. We were quite a company in ourselves, — eight of us Rose children, and Alice, and then papa and Miss Marston. After a while I spied the Unsworths and Van Burens and some other people we knew, and — back of them — perched up on a bench, as large as life, and just as interested as you please, if there was n't Nurse and Cook and Hannah! Well, Betty and I had to laugh!

We 'd hardly got seated when the crier began to call, "*Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!* All persons having business in this court, Supreme Court, in and for the city and county of New York, draw near, give your attention, and ye shall be heard." And court was opened.

Felix sat at a table which was near the jury; two of the fellows from Max's office were there, too, sorting papers for him. At another table, on the other side were Duff's lawyers, Mr. Bentley and two others. I could n't help noticing how young — almost boyish — Fee looked beside them; they were all stout and elderly. Duff was in court, too, — a great, fat, red-faced man, — and Betty kept throwing such wrathful glances at him that I was afraid he 'd notice her. Jermyn's widow was a little woman in black; she was awfully pale and thin, and so were the three children that were with her. "Poor creatures! they look as if they were *starved*," declared Betty, in an angry whisper; then she glared at Duff.

Mr. Bentley was Duff's principal lawyer; his manner was brusque, almost rough, and he had a very commanding way

of speaking. I think it frightened some of the witnesses, for they seemed to say just the very things he wanted them to. I began to get quite worked up over it; and 't was as much as I could do to keep Betty and Judge quiet.

Felix told us afterward that these were witnesses in rebuttal, and by and by came his chance at 'em, and then, I can tell you, things very quickly "took a turn."

If Fee did look boyish he soon proved that he knew a thing or two about law. He was just as cool and calm! Except, perhaps, for those two bright spots of colour on his cheeks, he showed not a sign of nervousness. I thought of the night before, and almost doubted if this *could* be the same person.

Well, if he did n't get those witnesses most beautifully "mixed" before he finished with them! Why, some of them got so twisted up in what they were saying that they contradicted themselves over and over again. And whew! was n't he sarcastic! in such a polite way, too; I could see that half the time they did n't know how to take him. Then he 'd say such amusing things with the soberest face and in the dryest sort of a voice — we and all the people round us were shaking with laughter, some of the very witnesses had to smile. But we could n't laugh aloud, for then the clerk would rap for order.

Everybody could see that Fee was quietly but steadily breaking down the evidence for the other side, and strengthening his own. Old Mr. Van Buren slid into a seat behind us, and every now and then he 'd whisper to papa, "That boy knows his business!" "Fine!" "A skilful piece of fencing that!" "That was a telling point!" and he 'd chuckle and rub his hands together as if he were enjoying it.

But Bentley and his colleagues did n't enjoy it much; first one would spring up and remonstrate and then another — but Fee knew what he was about, and only once did the judge say to him, "That question is excluded."

Then came the speeches, — "the summing up," Fee calls it, — when, to quote Paul, "each counsel tries to prove to the jury that *his* client is in the right and the other counsel's client in the wrong." And certainly Bentley did his best to accomplish that. He talked a good while, and really, by the time he got through, if we had n't known the other side so well, we would almost have believed that Duff was the kindest, most just and honorable of men, who 'd been wronged and imposed on by a wicked and unprincipled person named Jermyn. We were all so excited! I do believe Paul and Alan would have started a hiss — they were just preparing for it when Miss Marston squelched them. And we could hear Jermyn's widow sobbing, behind her long black veil.

Fee appeared to be listening with the deepest attention to what was said; now and then he jotted down something on a slip of paper that lay before him on the table. Then, when Bentley sat down, he got up and had *his* say.

As he rose Fee rested his hands on the table and, just for an instant, leaned forward and looked full at the end of our row, where Nannie and Alice sat beside papa. Then he straightened up and, with his hand on the back of a chair — to steady himself, though I think only we knew that — he made his bow to his "Honour" and the "Gentlemen of the Jury," and began his speech. There was no need to tell any of *us* to listen!

I saw the judge sit up in his chair and look at Felix — I suppose he wondered at his being so young. And somehow just then it popped into my mind to compare Fee with King David, — you know when he was a lad he went out to fight Goliath, — and it came to me that Fee was fighting a giant too, — the giant Injustice.

Felix has a splendid voice, — without seeming to speak at all loud he made himself easily heard all over that court-room; and, as papa said afterward, "his language was so

well chosen that it was a pleasure to listen to him." Of course, in helping to patch up that speech the night before, and in going over it with Phil while he wrote it off, I 'd got some idea of its style besides what Nannie said, but the real beauty of it came home to me when I heard Felix delivering it. And he did it so easily too, so smoothly, — not like Bentley's chopped-off sentences. He had memorised that speech so well that the words seemed to simply flow from his lips.

He began very quietly. I fancied that at first there was a nervous little quiver in his voice, but that soon passed away; and as he warmed up to his subject he just *held* everybody's attention. We were all *delighted*, — I found myself several times with my knee almost up to my chin; and I was so engrossed that I forgot to notice how the others were taking it.

Fee represented the other side of the case, — that of the widow and the orphans of Jermyn, poor, neglected, imposed on, — and I tell you, he just let himself go! He was earnest, satirical, stern, tender, going from one into the other with an eloquence that carried the whole court-room with it. And as he went along he tore Duff's argument all *to* pieces. There was a rustle of excitement throughout the court-room when he finished and sat down, and people looked at each other and nodded their heads and smiled. I should n't wonder if our heads wagged too. Then the judge made his charge, and the jury got up and filed out.

But they were n't gone long; in about ten or fifteen minutes back they came, and gave a verdict for the "plaintiff" — Felix had *won the case!*

VII.

AN ACCIDENT.

TOLD BY JACK.

AS soon as he could, Felix came to us. His cheeks were very red, his eyes fairly dancing. I could see that he was keyed up to the highest pitch, and he was in great spirits.

"Fee, you did *splendidly!*" cried Nan, warmly, as he approached, throwing out her hands to him.

But he took only one, and held out his other hand for a hand of Alice. "Did I?" he said, smiling and looking eagerly at her.

A minute before Alice had been just as interested as any of us, but now she got quite embarrassed, colouring up, and, after one quick upward glance at Fee, dropping her eyes as if she were confused. "Yes," was all she said; in a low voice too!

I was surprised, for she 's usually so enthusiastic when she is pleased. But Fee did n't seem to mind at all; in fact, he gave a little happy laugh as he shook the girls' hands. "How could I help doing my best when you were all here to inspire me?" he said gayly. "Why, as I feel now, the toughest law case that ever arose could not daunt me, — I feel equal to anything. That 's because I 've been successful; but failure knocks me all out." He slipped his hand into Nannie's arm, as we stood together. "Do you know what she and Phil and Jack did for me last night?" he asked Alice, in a soberer tone. "Do you know that but for them I should never have put foot in this court-room to-day? I

thought I had made a failure of my speech, and I fell over head and ears into a slough of despond. I was going to give up the whole thing!" He stopped, then added abruptly, "You see what poor material I 'm made of, — how I have to be bolstered up by the family?"

"He is always depreciating himself, Alice," broke in Nannie, hastily. "When it comes to himself don't believe all that Fee says."

"Ah, but this is truth," insisted Felix. "And I want her to know me just as I am, — faults, failings — every one. And there are a great many of them, I warn you." He spoke out decidedly, though there was a little anxious expression on his face too.

But it was Alice's turn to laugh now. "Oh, yes, you can afford to talk this way when you have just done so splendidly," she remarked. "I am sure anybody would be nervous on a first occasion like this. And as for faults — is there a human being who has n't faults and failings? If there be, I," with a positive nod of her head, "don't want to know him, for I think he might be a most uncomfortable sort of person to have about. You see, *I* have faults too," glancing at him archly, "*tons* of them, — you should ask mamma! — and such unfailing superiority would make my offences more glaring by contrast. I 'm sure I should get dreadfully depressed."

"That is one way of looking at it," began Fee, brightening up again; but here Betty broke in.

"Those 'very superior people,'" elevating her nose, "are worse than depressing, they are positively exasperating," she declared. She had come up in time to hear a part of Alice's speech. "Even if they say nothing — and that is one of the most provoking features of their make-up — one always feels as if they were pluming themselves on being so much nicer and wiser and better than the rest of humanity. Oh, I know them well! 'uncomfortable to live with' does

not express it! You need n't glare at me, Jack," in a lower tone, turning on me; " I 've not mentioned any names."

No; but I knew she had Mrs. Erveng and Hilliard in her mind, and I was afraid Alice might guess that. It seems so queer that Betty can't get over her first feeling of dislike toward those two people. We think Mrs. Erveng is charming, she 's so pretty and gentle; and we all like old Hill immensely, — that is, all but Betty. When they 're in the city she has as little to do with Mrs. Erveng as she can, — though I will admit she is more polite to her than before she spent that month at Endicott Beach, — and she does n't hesitate to snub Hilliard if she gets a chance. Yet, for all that, she answers the letters he writes to her now and then. Quite often he sends her photographs of California, or a book; and the queer part of this is that, though Betty is a generous person, these things always disappear right after their arrival, and are seen no more by us. And when Phil asked her one day what she did with them she got so *mad!* Betty is a queer girl.

But to go back to Felix. The Van Buren people and other friends of papa and Phil who were there, now came crowding about Fee to offer congratulations. Phil was in great spirits, and it was easy to see that papa was as proud as Punch of Fee, — though he did n't say much, he never does about anything, — so for a while there we had quite a lively time talking together.

We were all so excited that settling down seemed out of the question, and everybody was delighted when Phil declared that we should make a " gala occasion " of the evening. Papa was willing; so Phil and I rushed about and invited some of the young people we knew — Rollie Van Buren, Murray and Hope Unsworth, Helen Vassah, and one or two others. They all came, and we were having a jolly time, talking and singing and dancing, when who should come in but Chad Whitcombe! That threw a damper on

the whole affair, for we none of us have any liking for him — Nora was the only person who met him at all pleasantly; and that only provoked Betty. So there was a general assent when Phil proposed that we should all — except Chad, and Dr. Archard, who was talking with papa — sneak out of the drawing-room by ones and twos and go on up to the school-room, where we could finish our dance and have supper.

First one went, then another and another, until the company had, as Phil puts it, "melted like snow before the sun."

Betty and I were the last to slip away, and just as we were starting up the steps Nora flew out in the hall, highly indignant, and interviewed us. "You are all going up to have a good time in the school-room — I know you are — and leaving me alone down here to entertain Chad," she exclaimed, but in an undertone, lest he should hear her. "It is *very* rude to slight him — and in our own house too. Unless some of you stay with me, I declare I will take him straight upstairs."

"Oh, don't do that," I said hastily, "I 'll stay with you." I did n't want to lose all the fun, but I was afraid if Nora took Chad upstairs there 'd be trouble.

But Betty interfered. "No, you won't," she declared, turning on me; then, to Nora, "Nobody asked Chad to come here this evening, and if he had any sense when he found we had company he would have made a short call and gone away. As he has n't gone, and as you are the only person in the family who appears to appreciate his many *excellent* qualities," with a toss of her head and an airy wave of her hand, "why, naturally it should fall to you to entertain the honourable gentleman." Then suddenly wheeling round on the steps, as if to go down, she added in a very innocent voice, "I would n't advise you to take him upstairs, — something *might* be said or done that would hurt his dear little feelings; but if you insist on having some of

us with you, *I 'll* come in and help you make his visit pleasant."

When Betty puts on that tone and expression she intends mischief, and Nora knew that. "I think you are all just as mean as you can be!" she asserted, waiving the question, and went back into the drawing-room.

I agreed with her, and had n't I been pretty sure she would n't care to have me — Nonie does n't think much of my conversational powers — I would have gone back and stayed with her until Chad went. And I fancy perhaps Betty felt rather mean about it, too, for she stopped under the gas fixture in one of the halls to tell me: "Had it been anybody but Chad Whitcombe, I would have remained with Nora and made myself agreeable, or we would certainly have asked him upstairs to join in the fun. But he is simply horrid, and I *won't* encourage his coming here."

"But suppose — just suppose, you know — that Nora should like him —" I commenced; I don't know what made me say that, for I did n't really think she could care for an empty-headed fellow like Chad.

But Betty got quite excited. "What!" she cried, "Nora care for *him*? *Never!* She has more sense; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for even suggesting such a thing. I 've a great mind to go right down and stay there until he leaves." She half turned, as if undecided.

"Oh, don't get worked up over nothing," I put in hastily. "I only said that for fun. Chad is n't at all the sort to attract a girl like Nora. There 's the piano — ah! and Fee's violin! That 's a splendid waltz. Come on." And after a slight hesitation Betty complied, and we ran up to the schoolroom.

There was a gay time going on. Nannie was at the piano, and Felix sat beside her playing his violin. The big table had been pushed aside, and everybody was dancing, — Murray Unsworth leading off with Alice, while Phil followed suit

with Helen Vassah. I don't think I 've described Helen to you. Well, she is a shy girl, with soft, very dark eyes and dark brown hair that is always smooth and shining; somehow she makes one think of a timid little mouse. She has the smallest hands and feet! She is a little thing, anyway, for though she is nearly a year older than Betty, she barely reaches up to Phil's shoulder. It is very comical to watch them dancing together. She 's one of the quiet kind and a little bit prim, but still she 's nice.

If no one else was enjoying the occasion, the "kids" certainly were: Mädel and Alan were galloping about, trying to make themselves believe they were waltzing; Judge was walking all over Hope Unsworth's feet in his attempts to learn the step, and Kathie was sailing around the room with Rollie Van Buren in fine style — she dances nicely — and with a beaming countenance. Kathie dearly loves a grown-up partner! And you may be sure it was n't long before Betty and I were at it too. We had waltzes, galops, two-steps, square dances — and no end of fun!

Then came supper, and that was more fun, for the things were all upstairs and everybody pitched in and helped spread the feast. And the more mistakes were made the more sport and laughter there was. In the midst of it Nora appeared, — Chad had taken his departure — and she, Nannie, Hope, and Helen were flying about superintending things, and telling us boys what to do. Alice and Betty were at the grate fire making a welsh rarebit, and Fee sat in a chair, a little distance from them, laughing and talking with the girls, pretending to read them directions from an imaginary cook-book.

"Boil your eggs hard, then beat them," he was saying, staring at his outspread palm as if that were the book. "Fry your milk; and throw in sugar and pepper according to your judgment —"

"Suppose you have n't any judgment — what then?" cried

Alice, saucily, and turning slightly she shook the toasting-fork at him. And then — in a twinkling! the whole scene changed —

As Alice turned toward Fee and moved her arm, the lace on her sleeve flew out over the flame, and in an instant she was on fire!

Then for a few minutes there was a terrible excitement, — the sort of excitement where people seem to be paralysed and can't think what to do. Some said, afterward, they could n't even remember how anything happened — but I remember. Alice and Betty shrieked together; and, clutching hold of the burning sleeve with her other hand, Alice ran toward Felix, who had given a hoarse cry and was out of his chair, taking wild, uncertain steps to meet her, his arms outstretched. But like a flash Phil was ahead of him; leaping over chairs and the other obstacles in his way like a wild man. Tearing off his coat as he came along, he flung it round Alice, and, snatching her to him, with his hands and his body he beat out the flames. I flew to him and began to help; Fee 'd got there, too, — how, I don't know; but he gripped on to me with one hand, and with the other tore at Alice's burning clothes.

But with a little jealous movement — unconscious, I 'm sure — Phil drew Alice away from us. "*I* can do it — *I* can do it!" he kept saying between his teeth, as he struggled with the fire; and then to Alice, — in a low, tender voice, as I did n't dream Phil could use, — "Hush! hush! don't cry, my darling; you are safe." This was at the last, when the flames were out and as Alice sank into a chair, sobbing as if her heart would break.

I knew Phil was dreadfully excited and upset, or he would never have spoken like that to Alice, but I did n't know what she 'd think of it. Fee heard it, too, and the expression of his face frightened me. He threw a glance at Phil; astonishment, horror, fierce anger, — all were in it. Phil



"Alice and Betty were making a welsh rarebit."



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did n't see it, but I did, and my heart sank. His grip on my arm got so tight that it hurt, and he urged me forward until he stood close beside Alice's chair, — Phil was on the other side.

Felix was white, and he was breathing so fast that his nostrils were quivering. He laid his hand right on Alice's shoulder. "Alice — *Alice!*" was all he said, but his tone of voice was as if she belonged to him.

And Alice looked up at him with the sweetest expression in her tear-wet eyes. "I — I 'm not — hurt — much," she said, catching her breath between the words. "I — am — *so* thankful — " She stopped, with a little gasping shudder; and as she turned her head for an instant her chin touched Fee's fingers as they rested on her shoulder.

"*I* did n't save you from that horrible death," he cried out, in a hoarse whisper, taking his hand quickly away. "'T was n't *I* that saved you; it was — Philip." He *never* calls Phil that.

Then Alice turned and murmured something to Phil; I don't know what it was, but his answer was so distinct that Fee and I could not but hear it. "*Don't* thank me — don't!" he cried brokenly, then eagerly, the words almost tripping over each other. "If I could *only* have saved you this pain!" The next minute the others came crowding around Alice, each one anxious to do something for her.

Now, perhaps, this has taken a good while to tell, but it all happened in a very few minutes; and there was a tremendous hubbub going on the whole time, — screaming and loud talking and people rushing about getting water and blankets, which arrived when the affair was all over. Then Murray and Judge rushed off in different directions for the nearest physician; some of the others tore downstairs for olive oil and absorbent cotton; and by this time papa, Miss Marston, and every other member of the household were on the spot.

When Nannie drew aside Phil's coat, which was still around Alice, we saw that her beautiful, round right arm was bare to the shoulder; the sleeve had been burnt and torn off. And all the way up was visible, on the firm white flesh, the red and blackened track of the cruel flames.

Phil groaned and covered his eyes, — he could n't look at it. He went with the other men and the younger children to the farthest end of the room, and began walking nervously up and down. Felix moved away, too, but not very far; and when Betty's and Nora's courage failed, he held the dish of olive oil while Miss Marston and Nannie dressed the arm — until the doctor came.

They were just as gentle as they could be, but the pain was so intense that Alice nearly fainted; and it ended in Phil's having to carry her to her room.

It was a sorry conclusion to a jolly evening; but there was nothing for our guests to do but to go home, which they did. Nannie and Nora were with Alice, — the doctor had arrived, — and Betty had her hands full getting Kathie and the boys and Mädel off to bed. Fee and I were the only ones in the school-room; Nannie had asked me to gather up some of the things that were scattered about the room, and I was trying to do it. Fee sat at the big table, resting one arm on it, the other hand shielding his eyes. I could only see his mouth, and that was set like a vise. I felt he was in trouble, and I longed to comfort him; but what was there to say? And besides Felix is not the person who will always accept sympathy.

He had been sitting this way for some time, staring at the table in absolute silence, when Phil came in, shutting the school-room door hard behind him. "The doctor is dressing Alice's arm, and I *cannot* stay downstairs and hear her sobbing and moaning," he cried excitedly. He began striding restlessly backward and forward, his hands in his pockets, and talking in a quick, agitated voice. "It's

awful — slow torture! — to see any one suffer like that and not be able to afford relief — though you 'd give your very life to do it."

Neither Felix nor I answered a word, and presently, as the turn in his walk brought him near Fee, Phil stopped. "Felix," he said earnestly, speaking in that quick, impetuous way of his, "I 'm going to tell you something. I have never had any secrets from you, and I 'm not going to have 'em now. I don't mind your hearing it, Jack," as I came forward and reminded him I was present; "I don't care *who* knows it," vehemently; "I am proud of it — *proud* of it — no matter how it ends for me — Felix, I love Alice, I *love* her! and I 'm going to try to win her for my wife."

He paused, as if for an answer; and presently, without changing his position, Fee said, "Yes? — well," in a dull, level voice that I thought Phil must notice.

But he was so wrought up that he did n't; on he went: "I have n't much to offer her, I know — and she 's better off than I am. But I can work — other men have done it again and again — and make a home for her. I can do it, and I *will* if only she 'll care for me. I *think* she likes me, but I 'm not sure — I 'm such a dull fellow for one like her. You know us both, old chap; give me your honest opinion — do you think I have even a ghost of a chance with her?" He stood leaning against the table, looking intently down at Fee; his face and tone were anxious, and as the gas-light shone on him I saw there was a red mark on his forehead, and the bosom of his shirt was all blackened and scorched from the fire.

The room was very quiet; the clock was ticking away on the mantelpiece, and it seemed to me that my heart was thumping a race with it.

"Felix," Phil said, after waiting a minute or two, "does this silence mean that you think there 's *no* hope for me?

Oh, it seems to-night as if I *couldn't* bear that!" There was a sharp ring in his voice.

And then Fee spoke. He took his hand away from his face, which was white and haggard, but calm and resolute. "You have good looks and health and strength," he said slowly, as if weighing each quality, "and you have the ability to work for and to protect a wife. Yes, you have a better chance of winning her than — some others. She likes you now — in time she will probably — love you."

Phil's eyes lighted up; then something in Fee's tone must have struck him, for he cried out, in a quick, startled voice, "*Felix!* Do *you* care for Alice? Do *you* want to marry her?"

Fee rose very slowly to his feet, bending over the table as he used it for a support, but when he looked up at Phil his face was calm. "I shall never marry unless my health becomes fully restored," he said decidedly; "and you know about how likely it is that will ever come to pass. So dismiss any such idea from your mind."

As he stood there, holding his head high and gazing up at Phil square in the eyes, he looked so delicate that my heart ached, and I know Phil was touched. "You 're tired out to-night, old fellow," he said warmly, tenderly; "let me take you downstairs."

He made a motion, but Felix drew back. "Not — not to-night!" he exclaimed hastily, putting up his hand to keep Phil off.

There was a loud rap at the door, and the doctor — a stranger, brought in in the emergency — entered. "Where is the young gentleman whose hands I am to dress?" he inquired.

Then, for the first time, we learned that both Phil's palms were severely burned, and his left wrist. "Hurt?" he said, in answer to a question of the doctor's. "I should say they did; but this is nothing to Al — Miss Endicott's injuries.

This only helps me to a knowledge of how much *she* is suffering."

"One arm is pretty badly burned; but she is resting quietly just now, and I 'm in hopes she may have a good night," remarked the physician, as he began dressing Phil's burns. Fee was his assistant; he would n't let me help, though he looked hardly able to move, and he did his share so deftly that the doctor complimented him.

He and Phil had no sooner gone down than Nan came into the school-room. "Fee dear, you should have gone to bed long ago," she said; "and you, Jack; you both look completely fagged out. This has been a day of excitements," with a sigh. She looked tired.

"Ah! but it 's been a great day too," I put in quickly. "I can't forget Fee's victory. I tell you, Fee, you gave Duff a surprise party, and 't was brains did it." Dear old fellow! I wanted to comfort him a little.

Felix had sat down again by the table, and now he turned sharply on me. "Brains! brains!" he cried out scornfully, "they 're not worth *that*" — with a contemptuous snap of his fingers; "not *that*, compared with physical strength. Would all my brains — or ten like me — have saved Alice from an awful death to-night without Phil's strength? *I* was helpless when I would have given —" He paused abruptly. "*She*," he went on vehemently, with the quick upward movement of his hand that goes with anything he says of dear mamma, "used to bid me 'recognise my limitations and respect them.' I *have* recognised them, I 've *had* to, and God knows I 've tried to respect them! But are they to cut me off from *everything* that makes life sweet? Am I *always* to be an outsider? Oh, Nannie, have I courage to renounce? — have I strength? Nannie! Nannie!" His voice died away hoarsely; his eyes were wide open and hard, and the veins stood out on his forehead.

Swiftly to his side went Nan. "Dear," she whispered,

oh, so tenderly! "remember the promise, — 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be.' You have always been so brave, — don't lose courage now." Her arm went round Fee's neck, her cheek was pressed against his, and I heard the love in her voice as she murmured, "My poor boy! — my *dear!*" Then I went away and left them together.

Dear, faithful Nan! I had a feeling that she too had seen and heard all that happened during the fire; and I knew if there was comfort anywhere for Fee she would help him to find it.

VIII.

SOME STRANGE HAPPENINGS.

TOLD BY BETTY.

I WOULD like to know if as many things are all the time happening in other large families as in ours. Hilliard Erveng seems to think that is an advantage. "Where there are such a number of you" (he would n't say "lot" for the world!) "there is always sure to be something going on — happenings to one or another — and therefore a person can't be dull," he says. Perhaps, knowing dulness so well, that is what he most dreads; but I must confess that while some of our late happenings have been far from dull, they have certainly not all been agreeable.

For a week or so after the fire, ours was by no means a serene or cheerful household. Alice was shut up in her room, in great pain, and so low-spirited that one or two of the family began to worry, and suggested telegraphing to California for Mrs. Erveng and Hilliard to come on. I could n't see what good *they* could possibly do her, for Mrs. Erveng is herself an invalid, and Hilliard is not exactly what one might call a lively or brilliant companion! And Alice was certainly in no danger. There was a warm family discussion over it in the school-room, — for and against, — and in the meantime papa settled the question by writing a full account of the affair to Mrs. Erveng and leaving the coming on to her discretion.

Phil's burns turned out to be pretty bad, — he was n't fit to go to business for quite a while; he stalked about the house with his hands done up in absorbent cotton and oil,

"posing," so he said, "for an interesting invalid." But in reality he was as cross as a bear. He did n't know what to do with himself to pass the time, and expected that one or another of us should entertain him the whole time. Nora was a perfect slave to him!

And Felix, the one we all thought would have been flat on his back after the unusual work and excitement he 'd been through with that lawsuit, he kept up most beautifully. His appearance, though, was nothing to boast of; Judge declared Fee looked like "an animated rail," — he was so thin. But he must have felt better than he looked, judging by the way he devoted himself to business. His winning the lawsuit had brought him another case, and, as Nurse expresses it, wild horses could n't have kept him from the office. As Phil could n't be with him, Felix made an arrangement with one of the fellows in the office — who lives near here — that they should go down town in the mornings and up in the afternoons together. Phil is so strong and so thoughtful for him that Fee must have missed his care, and had to exert himself a great deal; but he never spoke of it. In fact, he said very little to anybody those days. He was down town all day, and evenings he 'd sit in his room with his law books spread out before him, and study, study, until I should think those fusty old dry-as-dust tomes would have addled his brains. We missed him, for Fee is good company, but remonstrance was useless; and when Phil began going into his room to talk to him, Felix quietly locked his door and shut us all out.

Altogether, those were very dull and uncomfortable weeks. No one seemed in good spirits, and everything was just as stale and flat as it could be. I could n't understand why this should be so, until one day it suddenly occurred to me that either something unusual had happened — I mean besides the fire — or was going to happen, and that I knew nothing of it.

Marching into the school-room, one afternoon, where Phil and Nora were talking, I heard him say, waving one swathed hand in the air to emphasise his words: "I 'm *positive* I 'll get on. The people down at the office like me — only the other day Mr. Crayshawe told me that if I kept on doing so well he thought there 'd be a chance for a junior partnership for me by and by. But, of course, without money to back one, it takes a longer time to accomplish. What worries me more than that is — does she care enough for me to wait — " He caught sight of me and stopped short, with such an air of annoyance as made me feel in the way.

That struck me as curious, for generally Phil is frankness itself, — he tells his affairs right out. And Nora looked so important, so deeply interested — excited, in fact — that I immediately began to suspect that "something was up," to use Jack's elegant phraseology.

"Oh, go on talking, go on," I urged; "don't let me interrupt your state secrets. Or were you two hatching a conspiracy? Well, I 'll play something heavy, and under cover of it you can resume your occupation." As I spoke I walked toward the piano.

"*Must* you practise now?" asked Nora; her tone of voice sounded like "How disgusting!"

"What will you have?" I did n't intend playing, but I was provoked, and the opportunity to tease was irresistible. "The 'Anvil Chorus,' or the 'Dead March in Saul'? Say the word and I 'll give you whichever of them would best suit your state of mind."

"I never saw such a girl!" cried Phil, irritably. "You are forever banging on that piano."

"If there is one quality that I admire more than another, it is veracity," I remarked; then, leisurely seating myself on the arm of a chair, "Come, now, let us talk it over; I hate to leave your *broad, liberal* mind under such a false impression."

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"A-c-h!" was Phil's ungrateful rejoinder. "You 've got about as much tact as — as — a frog. Come on downstairs, Nonie, into my room, where we can talk without being deafened by Betty's poundings on that unfortunate piano."

"Poor things! exiled from home!" I teased. They stalked past me with such an injured and indignant air that I had to laugh. "Jack is down there studying," I called after them. "But of course, *he* has no rights compared with you two. Shall I come along and evict him for you?" No answer was vouchsafed, but Phil whisked Nora out of the door as if he thought I were in pursuit.

In a few minutes up came Jack, looking decidedly ruffled. He set his books down hard on the table, and, drawing up a chair, rested his face in his palms and began studying, without a word to me.

I did n't speak for a while, I was busy thinking — putting "two and two together;" and I began to feel hurt as well as indignant — you see usually we are so open with one another. Presently I said abruptly, "Jack, what is all this mystery in the house?"

"Mystery?" exclaimed Jack, in a startled sort of way.

"Yes, *mystery!*" I repeated firmly, a good deal provoked by now. "Something has happened — I don't mean the fire — or is going to happen in the family, and I have not been told one syllable about it. Phil and Nora are in the secret; I think Felix is, too, and — perhaps — Nannie. You know all about it — I see that by your face; and I think you are all the *meanest* things to keep it from me. If I were one of the children, or a tattler, I could understand such treatment, but I 'm neither one nor the other; you know all about this — what *is* it?"

Jack glanced impatiently at the door. "I wish to goodness there was some place in this house where a fellow could go and study in peace," he said. "This is the *second* inter-

ruption. I guess you people must think I just breathe knowledge in from the air."

"You need n't get excited over it, and you need n't think you 're going to get out of answering," I remarked. Then I put the question point blank: "Do you, or do you not, know what this is that 's going on?"

I was sure of an answer one way or the other, for Jack does n't know how to evade a question, and, whatever other faults he may have, he would n't tell an untruth for the world.

Turning those big eyes of his on me, with such a worried expression in them that I could have laughed, he said nervously: "I — yes — I — I do know what it is, Betty; but — I was n't exactly told; it was just said before me — and — well, really I *could n't* tell you — though I 'd like to. 'T would n't be fair to F— any of them."

"Oh, you could n't, eh? Well; I 'll ask Nannie; she —" But Jack interrupted.

"Oh, don't do that," he exclaimed hastily. "That would only trouble her. She would 've said something to you about it of her own accord if she had wanted you to know. I guess she feels as I do, — that it is n't our affair to talk about. Anyway," a little impatiently, "all you are losing by not knowing is some worry." Then, as if on an impulse, he added in a lower tone — sheepishly, blushing up to the very tips of his ears: "Betty, do you remember years ago when you and I — eh — prayed for Fee to go to college? Well," as I nodded, "let 's do it again — now, will you? Not for college, of course, but for — well, let 's just ask for comfort and strength for him. I guess that 'll cover everything. Say, will you? Will you, Betty? Shall we shake hands on it?" He leaned eagerly forward, holding out his hand to me; and I could see his eyes were misty.

After that there was no asking him any more questions, — all I could do was to keep quiet. 'T was n't really that I

was so curious — though, of course, I did want to know — as the feeling that the family had a mystery they would n't share with me. Not even Nannie had said a word to me about it. I felt dreadfully hurt, and mad, too; and I made up my mind I would n't ask any more about it if they *never* told me.

A few days after this — one afternoon — on my way to the school-room, I stopped at Jack's door to speak to him. He was at the table writing, and there was about him such an air of pleasant excitement that I asked involuntarily: "Why, what 'change has come o'er the spirit of your dream'? You look as if you were enjoying your lessons."

"Oh, it is n't a lesson," he said, colouring up. "I 'm just trying to see if I can do something that Alice suggested several weeks ago." And then he put on such an absurd, bashful look that I had to laugh, and settled myself to have some fun.

Take him all in all, Jack is the best-natured person imaginable. He is inclined to be lazy; but let any one be ill or in distress and he will almost run his legs off for them without a thought of the trouble to himself. And (though he can be obstinate, too) he 'll give in, and give in again and again, as he expresses it, "for peace' sake." Nannie thinks that is so lovely; she often tells me — when I get angry and blaze out — that she wishes I would try to be more like Jack. That 's all very well, and sometimes I do wish I could be as patient and forgiving as he is, but then again I get *so* provoked with him! I believe in a person's having *some* spirit; and if I did n't fight his battles he would get most dreadfully imposed on, even here at home. How he manages at school, I can't imagine; I suppose the other boys just own all his things, and himself too.

I have great fun teasing Jack; I say and do the most ridiculous things just to see the puzzled, almost worried look that comes over his face. I can work him up to quite a

pitch in a very few minutes, though one would think that by now he certainly ought to understand me.

"Oh, I see — another mystery," I remarked pleasantly, lounging against the side of the door. "I suppose, now that Felix has done so brilliantly at the bar, *your* ambitious soul is burning to burst forth and dazzle the world. Of course, being an *outsider*," I reared my head with a great air of dignity, "*I* am debarred from asking questions; but I hope, for the reputation of the family, that what you have undertaken is nothing less than an elegant translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey, or a rendering into Latin of 'Paradise Lost.'" Jack's strong point is certainly *not* languages, and he knows it.

"You know very well I could n't do anything like that," he said literally; "but —" he hesitated. "It 's a secret," he went on; "but I want you to know it. Come in; shut the door — there 's some one in the next room, and I don't want 'em to hear." Then, as I closed the door and came and took a seat beside him, he added impressively: "I 've written a *story!* If you promise not to tell a single creature, I 'll read it to you."

"H'm, I did n't go so very far out of the way, did I?" I remarked. "Is it in Latin or Greek?"

"If you 're going to be disagreeable, I 'll not read it," declared Jack, making a motion to sweep his writing into a drawer of the table.

I did want to hear it, so I hastened to give the required promise; and he began to read the story aloud, — at first in a shamefaced sort of way, and so fast that I could hardly follow him, and looking sharply at me now and then to be sure I was n't laughing at him. But, indeed, after the first page or two I grew so interested that I had no desire to laugh, and simply sat and listened with all my ears. I 've told you how voraciously Jack devours stories of wild adventure, — well, this story was after that order. It described an

elephant hunt, and so vividly, with such a dash and *verve*, that I could n't believe our quiet, "girlie" Jack could have written it. Of course papa is a writer, and it is n't so very strange that one of his children should write — but that it should be Jack!

"You never wrote that," I exclaimed incredulously, as he finished reading. "Why, it sounds like a Mowgli story."

"Oh, yes, I did — *I* wrote it," cried Jack, with a beaming countenance. "Does it *really* sound Mowgli-ish? Jolly!" and he embraced his knee.

"You mean to say that you made up every word, every line, every incident in that story?" I asked — I could n't get over my surprise.

"Every single word, line, incident came out of my brain, my imagination," declared Jack, earnestly. Then the colour flew over his face, and he turned reproachfully on me. "Why, Betty! what do you mean?" he cried out. "Do you suppose I 'd pass this off as my work if it was n't?"

I was sorry I had hurt his feelings; but when I explained that my only reason for doubting the authorship was because the story was so fine, he became very friendly again, — that is one splendid thing about Jack, he never holds malice long against any one. "Why, I 've been writing stories for ever so long — years," he confided to me; "but I did n't like to show them for fear you people would laugh at me. There are lots of 'em up in the school-room under the sofa;" Jack still hides some of his belongings under the flounce of the old sofa. "Alice happened to see one of them by accident, and she 's kept at me ever since to write something and send it to a magazine. Would you send this? D' you think it 's good enough?"

"Well, I should think so!" I assured him. "I 'm sure anybody would be *delighted* to get it."

After some deliberation, we concluded that "St. Nicholas" should be the favoured one. "I can take it there," said

Jack, "to save postage, and call for their answer; then — if they *should* refuse it, nobody here need know of it; eh? They'd only have a grand laugh at me."

"St. Nick will take it, don't you worry," I said encouragingly. Then, after a little more urging, I got Jack started off with the manuscript, and a carefully written note to the editor, — we must have sacrificed six or seven sheets of paper before this note was accomplished to our entire satisfaction.

As I turned back into Jack's room to straighten up his table and put away his writing materials, I heard Nannie's voice in Fee's room, — his door was ajar, and the tap, tap of his cane on the floor was very audible as he walked up and down. "The doctor thinks Alice can go down to dinner to-morrow," Nan was saying. "Of course she won't be well for some weeks yet, but he wants to get her out of her room to where she can see more people and have a little diversion. Poor Alice! she tries to be brave, but this accident has been a dreadful shock to her."

I had things in order by now, and concluded I'd go in and chat awhile with Fee and Nannie — I love to have them to myself now and then. I was at Fee's door, my hand outstretched to push it open — but I did n't go in. Instead I drew the door noiselessly to until it was quite closed, and then I ran up to the school-room, and sat there in the half dark of the winter afternoon. It did n't matter to me in the least that the younger children were tearing about the room in a noisy game; I was too much engrossed with my own thoughts to mind them.

While I stood by his door reaching out my hand to push it open, this is what Felix had said, so vehemently that I was startled: "If I could only go away somewhere — *miles* away from here — to the other end of the world, if I could; where I should *never* lay eyes on her again, — and there fight the whole thing out alone! 'T is n't the laying of

the sacrifice on the altar that 's the hardest part, Nan, — human nature *can* rise for a brief minute to heights of exaltation. It 's the days that come after that, that eat the very heart and courage out of one, — the continual struggle to keep from snatching back, from *stealing* back that which in the beginning was a free offering. I 'm trying my level best to do what I *know* is right — for her, — God knows I am, — but I 'm not a stock or a stone — "

That was all, for I rushed away upstairs. What did it mean? Phil's unfinished sentence in the school-room came to my mind. Were his "she" and Felix's "her" one and the same? I asked myself. Then I thought of what Jack had proposed he and I should do for Fee, — "strength and courage." Ah, indeed, I would pray for him! I could not quite understand it all; but as I sat there in the dark by the window, my heart ached for poor Fee; and I wondered why all his life he had had so much more than the rest of us to contend with.

Jack was in great spirits that evening. He stuck by me like my shadow, and — in the strictest confidence, of course — unfolded for my criticism any number of "plots" for future stories, until I got fairly worn out, and went to bed and had most horrible dreams of lions, tigers, elephants, — a whole menagerie, in fact. Fee went straight from the dinner-table to his own room, and locked himself in "to study." But Phil seemed unusually cheerful. After an ineffectual attempt to get Felix to chat with him, he took out his banjo, and sat in the school-room nearly all the evening, singing and playing for his own entertainment.

The next afternoon Alice came down to dinner for the first time since the accident. Those weeks of pain had pulled her down. Her colour was n't so bright, and her eyes seemed to have grown larger. — I suppose because her face was thinner. She wore a tea-gown, and her arm was in a sling.

I thought she looked lovely; and she was just as sweet as she could be.

We were all delighted to have her downstairs again; papa actually kissed her! He is very fond of Alice, — indeed, we all are; and each one vied with the other in showing her attention. Nannie and Nora had put our prettiest things on the table, Cook had prepared one of her nicest dinners, and Hannah waited on us with a face wreathed in smiles. Felix was the only member of the family missing, and just before we sat down to dinner came a telegram from him, stating that he was delayed down town with Max, who had just returned, — not to wait for him.

But Phil was very much in evidence. He brought Alice a beautiful bunch of roses, constituted himself the one to assist her up and down the stairs and even over the sill of the dining-room door! waited on her most assiduously, hovering about her with an air of devotion that no one could help noticing. It was too absurd! We older ones managed to keep a straight face, — in fact, Jack looked as solemn as an owl. But Kathie and Mädel were all eyes, and Judge and Alan kept nudging each other and bursting into fits of half-suppressed giggling, until Miss Marston, in a severe undertone, threatened to send them from the table. Papa noticed it, too, I think, for once or twice I saw him glance from Phil to Alice with a queer, perplexed expression on his face that amused me. Papa still looks upon us all as children; he does n't seem to realise that we are growing up, — though some things that have happened lately must rather have opened his eyes to it.

About the middle of the evening Felix came in, bringing Max with him, and you may be sure everybody was glad to see Max again, — he stayed longer out West than he expected. While the others were crowding around Max, shaking hands and talking and laughing, Felix slowly made his way to Alice. She was leaning back in her chair, languidly listening to

some remarks of Phil, who stood beside her, and she did n't know Fee was near until he spoke. Then she sat up quickly and turned to meet him, colouring up, and holding out her left hand to him with a smile that was radiant and yet shy.

But instead of greeting her warmly, as I expected, Felix held her hand stiffly for a moment, murmuring something, then let it drop, and, going to the farthest end of the room, began talking earnestly to papa.

I was perfectly amazed! And I think Alice was too. I saw her eyes open wide, — startled, hurt, — and some of the colour go out of her cheeks for an instant, then she sank back in her chair; and when I got to her she was saying quietly to Phil, who had not seen this by-play, "I think I am getting tired. Could n't I go upstairs now?"

Very soon after that she bid everybody a smiling good-night, and Phil and I helped her up to her room.

Since the accident we older girls have taken turns in helping Alice to dress and undress; and that night it was my turn.

"Oh, dear! I am *so* tired!" she declared, when we got in her room, sitting down wearily on the side of the bed, "I almost wish I had n't gone down at all." Then she looked wistfully up at me. "Betty," she asked, "do you know if I have done anything to offend Felix? He treated me so strangely this evening. He was so stiff and cold — like a stranger — and it is the first time I have seen him since that awful night." She finished with a little shudder. "Did n't you notice how he acted?"

I felt as if I would like to give Mr. Fee a piece of my mind. "Of course you have n't offended him," I said decidedly. "Why, you poor child! how could you? Have n't you been shut up here for weeks? And Felix is n't such an idiot as to get angry without any cause. He did *not* say a great deal to-night, but that does not prove he was n't very glad to see you. You know, Alice, Fee never shows his feelings as Phil does. He came in late, and it may be that he



"'I almost wish I had n't gone down at all.'"



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had something important to say to papa." I was trying to convince Alice when I was far from being convinced myself, and I felt as if she must see right through the sham; but she did n't.

"Well," she said slowly, after a slight pause, "I will wait and see what to-morrow brings. You may be right. And besides, Felix and I are friends, — I don't like to think that he would wilfully slight me. Thank you, Betty." So evidently what I said had comforted her.

But as the days wore on I was more and more puzzled by Fee's behaviour to Alice, when she began to be about the house as usual. He was always polite, and, when we are all together, even friendly and pleasant to her, but it was all in what we call his "company manner," — a sort of manner that holds one at a distance. Under a pretence (I 'm sure it was a pretence sometimes) of being very much interested in his new lawsuit, he became very exclusive, and spent evening after evening in his room. And when he was with us it seemed to me that he took as much pains — in a quiet way — to avoid Alice as Phil did — openly — to be with her. I was really ashamed of the way Fee acted; I did n't know what Alice would think of him. He was no more like the Felix that had been so jolly and friendly with her than I am like Jack. And, as far as *I* know, for no reason at all! And yet I could n't believe that Fee was angry with Alice, for now and then, when he thought no one saw him, he would look at her with his very heart in his eyes. *I* felt badly about it, for Alice is my friend, and I was pretty sure she felt the way Felix was acting. She did n't allude to the subject again, and went about the house just as usual, smiling and being bright and pleasant; but she did n't get back her strength as rapidly as we expected she would. Nannie was a little worried, I think, and declared frankly that she was very glad when tidings came that Mrs. Erveng and Hilliard would soon start for the East.

I made up my mind that I would speak to Felix about Alice, the first good opportunity I got. Fee is n't the sort of person one can order about and make do things as is Jack; but I felt he ought to know that I — and perhaps others too — had noticed his queer behaviour.

Phil was so absorbed in his devotion to Alice that he had no thought for anything or any one else; but I fancy the rest of the family would certainly after a while have discovered how matters stood had not something occurred just then so unexpected and — *I* think — so extraordinary, as to put everything else entirely out of mind.

IX.

— AND A DISCLOSURE.

TOLD BY BETTY.

THERE were two "happenings" that evening, but one was of so much more importance that the other passed almost unnoticed. It was a cold, blustering night; the wind was howling around the house in a most uncanny fashion. It was enough, Phil declared, to give one the "creeps," and Jack said it sounded "like the wail of some lost soul in purgatory," and made him think of that picture of Doré's in the "Inferno," where those who have told lies are twisting and writhing in agony. "Can't you just imagine it 's they," he cried, bending forward in a listening attitude, "howling to us of their anguish and remorse?" He does have the oddest ideas!

But indoors things were more cheerful. A bright fire blazed and crackled in the school-room grate; and with curtains drawn, and plenty of light, the room looked a cosey place to spend an evening. The family evidently thought so, for we were all there except Nora, who, I thought, had stopped to speak to Miss Marston.

Nannie had coaxed Fee to come up, and he and she were giving us a lovely violin duo. The others were all enjoying themselves after one fashion or another: Kathie and the younger ones playing games; Jack was reading — as well as he could with my talking to him every two minutes; Alice lay back in a chair listening to the players, but not looking at them; and near her, on a low Japanese stool, sat Phil. It has got so now that wherever you see Alice, you may be sure Phil is not far distant. He keeps by her like her shadow, and

pays her the most open and constant attention, perfectly regardless of the teasing he gets from some of us. *I* fancy that at first these attentions annoyed Alice; it seemed to me that she rather snubbed Phil, and used to get out of his way; but after a while she began to be nice to him again; and the beaming countenance Phil carried about was *too* funny! Even Jack, dense as he usually is, noticed it, and helped me laugh sometimes.

"Now it is some one else's turn to furnish entertainment," Nannie said, as she laid down her violin. "Not you, Alice," Alice's arm was still in a sling; "but some of the others. Who shall it be?"



"Phil began to 'plunk his light guitar.'"

Kathie and Phil bobbed up at the same minute. "I 'll play my new barcarole," "I 'll give you the latest 'from Zanzibar,'" they exclaimed together.

"Now, Phil, *I* was first," asserted Kathie, starting for the piano.

"Age before beauty, my infant," answered Phil, reaching for his mandolin; then, in his stage-manager manner, "I will now relate the tragic tale of 'a typical tune of Zanzibar,' after which Mademoiselle Kathé will favour the audience with her famous barcarole."

"You 're not one bit polite, — making me come after you," cried Kathie, with more indignation than elegance.

"Let 's put it to the vote who is to play first," drawled Judge. But Phil, determined to lose no time, began at once to "plunk his light guitar," and to warble forth his mournful lay, casting expressive sidelong glances at Alice, evidently perfectly indifferent to the fact that nearly everybody was talking and nobody listening.

It was just then that the first happening occurred.

"I think some one is knocking," Fee said loudly, to gain attention, — he sat by the table turning over the leaves of a book and pretending to be interested in it. I knew it was pretence by the very different way in which he looked at Phil and Alice when he thought no one was noticing.

"*Come* in," shouted Judge, Alan, and Mädel in one breath, and, flying across the room, Alan threw open the door. There stood our new maid — Hannah had gone home for a few weeks to nurse her sick mother — and a strange gentleman. Delia is Hannah's cousin, and a pretty raw specimen, but we were trying to put up with her for a few weeks; and now, poking a card at Alan, which fell on the floor, she immediately disappeared down the stairs without a word. While Alan was grovelling on the floor in search of the card, the stranger stepped into the school-room. A sudden quiet had fallen on us; Phil had stopped short at "Towser had heard — " and all eyes were turned on the new-comer.

Glancing around at us with a comprehensive bow, he announced himself briefly and very distinctly: "My name is Warwick."

Into my mind flashed the remembrance of a piece of what Miss Marston calls "standard poetry," which has been part of our school curriculum, and without the slightest volition on my part my mouth opened, and to my great astonishment I heard myself quoting, "'On the Grampian hills my father fed his flocks.'"

That broke the spell of silence that had fallen on us.

"Betty!" exclaimed Nannie, in such a tone of mortification that I felt as if I 'd like to get under the table. Jack and Paul giggled; some of the older ones did too, I think; and catching up his cane, Felix started forward as quickly as he could. "A relative of my father's old friend Mr. Warwick, of Chevny Priory in England?" he asked pleasantly.

"His nephew," replied the young man, shaking hands very cordially; "my credentials lie in this letter from my uncle to Mr. Rose." He drew a letter from his pocket as he spoke and handed it to Fee. "I am afraid I owe an apology," he went on with a touch of diffidence, "for coming up here; but it is not all my fault. I asked for Mr. Rose, and the — eh — maid murmured something unintelligible and led the way here."

"She 's a new one, and gets rattled if you look at her," explained Phil, who by now had come to the front, while Fee was saying to Nannie, "I did n't know the *pater* went to the Society on Thursday evenings," and she was answering, "He said he *might* go to-night."

Then Felix began introducing the stranger to us.

Just then Alan made a diversion. He had picked up the card and brought it to the light. Holding the piece of pasteboard in the hollow of his hand, so that Mädel and Judge should not see and anticipate him, he read slowly, and so loud that every one in the room heard him: "Hon-o-u-r-able Reg-in-ald Geo-rge War-wick." He sounded the last *w* distinctly, and the first two *g*'s hard, and the effect was so funny that we all laughed, the stranger included. I was thankful this occurred just while Mr. Warwick was being introduced to me, for it seemed to turn his attention from me; and I immediately proceeded to obliterate myself for the rest of the evening, in the hope that my unlucky remark would be forgotten. I get *so* provoked with myself when I make those abominable speeches; and yet I don't know

how to help it, — they pop out when I least expect it. I subsided into a chair at the farthest end of the table, beside Jack, and kept very quiet.

Mr. Warwick is a regular giant in size, — bigger than Phil, and several years older, I should think, — and he has a pleasant face, though not a bit good-looking. He turned out to be a first-rate fellow; we saw a great deal of him — at least for a while — and all got to like him very much. He made himself so agreeable this first evening, and his manners were so simple and unaffected, that, instead of adjourning to the drawing-room, all stayed where they were, and had a jolly, cosey time in the shabby old school-room.

Everybody was friendly; in fact, when it came out in conversation that Mr. Warwick knew the Van Burens, through his cousin Vera — who is Mr. and Mrs. Van's granddaughter — and some others of our friends, Phil got so excited that I thought he was going to fall on the Honourable R. G.'s neck, and welcome him as a long-lost brother, without even the preliminary of asking if he had "a strawberry mark" on his arm.

He stayed a good while, and gave his attention so entirely to Alice and Nannie and the boys, that I began to think perhaps he had n't understood my unfortunate quotation, or else that in the delightful conversation which had ensued he had forgotten all about it. This was such a relief to my mind that I got back my spirits and began talking to Jack, which attention I am afraid he did n't appreciate as much as it deserved.

But I was not to get off so easily, for when Mr. Warwick rose to go and had made his adieux to the others, he walked the length of the school-room to say to me, "Good-night, Miss Elizabeth" — Nannie and I won't allow the boys to introduce me any longer as Betty; it sounds too babyish, now that I 'm grown up.

Instantly several thoughts whirled through my brain.

Had he heard? Should I apologise? What *should* I say? Jack declares that I threw a most imploring glance at Nannie, and got as red as a beet; and I can't contradict it, for I know I felt horribly uncomfortable.

Presently, in the midst of my confusion, I heard Mr. Warwick saying, "Though my name is n't Norval, I assure you I 've a tremendous liking for the Grampians, and many a tramp I 've taken over them."

"'T was the way you said — you said — your name that made me think of it," I mumbled stupidly; then added, feeling that I ought to explain my rudeness: "I really had no idea I was going to say it — the words just — popped out."

"Well, I am glad they did," he remarked, so heartily that I looked up in surprise. "You see," he went on, quite confidentially, "I 've a jolly little sister at home, who is fond of getting off that piece, and your quotation as I came in this evening sounded so natural that it — well, it just broke the ice, you know. I suppose my self-announcement *was* rather *à la* Norval."

"I found it so," I said meekly, wondering if this were the place for my apology to come in. But just then I caught sight of the twinkle in his eye, the smile that was lurking round the corners of his mouth, and, with a sudden impulse, we both laughed. After that we were the best of friends, until — But, there, as Jack would say, you 'll hear about that afterward.

Phil saw Mr. Warwick to the front door; and when he came racing back, Nora was with him. "Why, where have you been all this time?" "You 've missed *such* a nice fellow!" "Cousin to Vera Warwick!" "Came to see the *pater*, and, he being out, that brilliant Delia showed him up here," were a few of the remarks volunteered as she came in.

"Papa did not go out, but he was occupied with a most

important matter, so it is just as well Delia did not disturb him about this stranger," Nora said. Nora is nothing if not superior, — we all know that, — but now she was so *very* consequential as instantly to attract attention.

"From which tone I gather that *you*, fair creature," Phil clasped his hands rapturously and made languishing eyes at her, "were that '*most important matter*' — excuse the emphasis; I feel that the subject demands it."

"Well, yes, I was," admitted Nora, a little conscious smile curving her lips.

"Ah, really, this grows very interesting," remarked Fee, looking quizzically at Nora through his glasses.

The children were all eyes, and Judge called out excitedly, "Go on, Phil, ask some more, — you 're burning."



"Holding the piece of pasteboard in the hollow of his hand."

"'Be it sad, be it glad, be it something to make me mad,' still tell it to me at once, I implore — anything — *anything*, but this cru-*el* suspense," cried Phil, running his fingers wildly through his hair and striking a tragic attitude.

Nora's smile widened a little, and she gazed deliberately from one to the other of us. I think she enjoyed the situation; and as she sat there on the broad arm of the old rocker, slowly swinging herself to and fro, she certainly

looked as lovely as a picture. Her gray eyes are the kind that grow dark and brilliant under any excitement, and her complexion is the prettiest of any girl *I* know.

"Oh, hurry and tell us, Nonie dear," Nannie said, coming over and resting her hand on the knob of the rocker, — it seemed to me she looked anxious.

"Yes, we 're all waiting," chimed in Alice.

"I 'll bet you I know what it is," whispered Jack to me; but before I could answer him Nora spoke.

"Well," she said slowly, that little important smile hovering round her lips, "I might as well tell you at once — I am engaged to marry Chadwick Whitcombe! It is all settled; Chad spoke to papa this evening and — he has given his consent." She did n't say (what we found out afterward) that it had taken the whole evening, with all the urging Chad and she could bring to bear on it, and Max's influence besides (Chad had got him to come round) to get papa's consent.

Nora's announcement fell upon us with all the startling effect that she expected. For one brief moment we sat and stared at her — speechless! — then there was an almost simultaneous and very unflattering outburst. "Why, Nora! you 're *too* good for *him!*" cried out Felix, sharply; while Phil brought his clinched hand down on the school-room table with a most emphatic: "You 're *never* going to marry that empty-headed little ass!" Jack began, feebly: "Well, of all people —!" then sat and stared at Nora as if he had never seen her before. "Then you 'll get *married* and go — away — o-o-h!" wailed Kathie, rushing around the long table and falling on Nora's neck.

I was simply *furious*. That of all the men who were attentive to her, she should have chosen that insignificant, affected jackanapes seemed incredible. "It ought *not* to be allowed, — he 's a perfectly horrid, disgusting little snob!" I declared, raging up and down the room. "He is shorter

than you are — and he has n't two ideas in his head. It 's a disgrace to us! Somebody should have stopped it. I can't see how papa could *ever* have consented!" I was so mad that I hardly knew what I was saying, and it would have been a real satisfaction to know that Phil had gone out and thrashed Chad. I had always been suspicious of his attentions to Nora, but I never really for one moment thought that she would *marry* him.

Jack says that while I was tearing up and down and airing my opinion of Chad, Alice went forward and congratulated Nora, and that Nannie put her arms round her and kissed her, saying in that sweet, honest way of hers, "Nonie dear, I hope you will be *very* happy."

Jack declares that Nora's head went down on Nan's shoulder, and that she clung to Nan for a minute or two. But I guess he imagined that, for when I noticed her, Nora was sitting up as proud and stiff as she could sit, with Kathie standing sniffling beside her. "Well," she said, as soon as she could make herself heard, in what Judge styles her "most haugh*tay* manner," — "Well, I did not suppose I should be overwhelmed with congratulations, but I *did* look for some sign of kindly interest, or at least politeness, though I ought to have known from past experiences what to expect!" She threw her head up proudly. "Of all the uncouth, severe, narrow-minded people in the world, I think you are the worst."

"You know very well why we don't like Chad," broke in Felix.

"When a person acknowledges an error, and tries — *proves* that he can do better, he ought to be encouraged," declared Nora, feelingly. "But because Chad is n't *just* after the family pattern, you are n't any of you willing to admit there is good in him. *I* call that the narrowest kind of narrow-mindedness," with a sweeping glance that included all the Roses, — even unoffending Nannie and the weeping Kathie!

"Interest?" cried Phil, roughly; "if we did n't feel what you call 'kindly interest,'" with such an exact imitation of Nora's tone that Paul and Alan giggled, "do you suppose we 'd care *who* you married? For the life of me, I can't understand what you see in that conceited little as— creature. Even the old woman and her cow seem more in the fitness of things. And you 're a sly one, too," shaking his finger at her; "this sort of thing going on, and you never said *one* word to me about it. That," very significantly, "is n't *my* style."

That seemed to nettle Nora. "I don't care whether you approve of Chad or not," she declared angrily, ignoring Nan's earnest "Oh, Phil, Nora, *don't* quarrel!" "He suits *me*, and that is enough. And as for slyness, *I* am not responsible if you are all so stupid that you can't see what is before your very eyes. Did you expect me to run to each member of the family and ask his or her consent before I told Chad —"

> "'I am ready to marry, to be your bride,
> Only plunk again, on your light guitar,
> That typical tune of Zanzibar,'"

sang Judge; he had got hold of Phil's mandolin and was picking the wildest kind of an accompaniment, looking up at Nora as he sang with an expression on his impudent little face that completely upset everybody's gravity.

"You are a *very* impertinent little boy!" cried Nora, making a desperate effort to keep her dignity; "you ought to have been in bed long ago." Then the corners of her mouth widened, and against her will she had to join in our laugh.

That cleared the atmosphere wonderfully.

"Come to my arms, old girl; 'with all thy faults, I love thee still,'" quoth Phil, making a dash for Nora and giving her a hug. "I 'll try to be decent to the 'great Shad,' for your sake, but, I warn you! I 'm going to keep an eye on

him, and if he does n't walk a chalk line, I 'll punch his head for him and grind his bones to powder!"

Had anybody else said that, hostilities would have been resumed on the spot. But Nora has a weakness for Phil, so all she said was, "Don't be at all alarmed on my account; there is not the slightest occasion for it." And she submitted to his bear's hug without the usual reminder that he was messing her hair and rumpling her gown, until he went on to ask in an incredulous tone, "Tell me, Nonie, are you really *in love* with Chad?" Then she flashed an indignant glance at him and demanded to be set free "at once!"

On the principle, I suppose, of making the best of what could n't be helped, the others now grew quite interested, and began making pleasant remarks. Judge, Alan, and Mädel were very anxious to know when the wedding would take place, if there would be "a party" and bride cake; Kathie suggested that she might fill the rôle of maid of honour and carry a basket of flowers; while Jack convulsed us by asking, in the tone of one to whom the matter was serious, whether Chad would come to live with us after the marriage, or if Nora would take up her residence with him in his bachelor quarters.

Several times Jack nudged me to speak, but I paid no attention to him. I was so disgusted with Nora for taking Chad, that I knew if I said anything at all it would be disagreeable; so, as I did n't want to have another fuss, I kept my mouth shut. I did n't suppose Nora would care; but when Alice rose to go to her room, and I started to go with her, Nora said, in that snippy little way that does so exasperate me, "I 'm *so* much obliged to you, Betty, for your congratulations and good wishes, — you have been so sisterly."

Then it occurred to me, for the first time, that perhaps I need n't have said quite as much as I had; that is another of my faults, — the sharp angry words come first, then, when they are all out and beyond recall, I begin to realise that it

would have been kinder and wiser to have kept quiet. Nan stood behind Nora's chair, and I knew very well what her brown eyes were signalling to me. But it is not easy for me to say pleasant things when my heart is n't in them. "Well, you see, Nora, I never did care — *very* much — for Chad," I began, "and I am not going to fall on his neck now and pretend that I 'm overjoyed. If you had taken Rollie Van Buren, or Murray, or Doctor Gordon, I would have been *delighted;*" then, realising this was n't what I should have said, I went on hurriedly: "But of course, you are the person that is going to marry him, not I, and if *you* are satisfied, why — why — I suppose *we* ought to be." Then, as I stooped and kissed her, a hot, angry feeling toward Chad came over me, and I *could n't* help bursting out with: "Oh, Nonie, you are millions too good for that horrid — for that — for him — and if he does n't treat you well I 'll — " I did n't dare trust myself to finish; and as I wheeled round and dashed out of the room, I heard a peal of laughter, and Paul and Alan chanting:

"I 'll not scold nor beat you,
I 'll just merely eat you!"

That same evening, while I was brushing out Alice's long thick hair for the night, Nannie and Nora came in and settled down comfortably for a little chat. We often do this, generally in Nannie's and my room; but since the accident we 've got in the way of meeting in Alice's room.

Of course we talked of Nora's engagement. She did n't seem to mind; indeed, she took the lead and spoke of it in the coolest, most matter-of-fact manner imaginable, — without so much as a blush! I looked at her in surprise. Not that I wanted her to go about simpering like a goose, and dyed in blushes if Chad's name were mentioned; that would be *too* silly! But I had never had an engaged girl right under my very eyes before, so I hardly knew what to expect; yet



"While I was brushing out Alice's long thick hair."

I was disappointed. I caught myself wondering if Nan would have acted so and so. Theirs is a "love match," — goodness knows, nobody urged her to take him, — so I suppose Nora does care for Monsieur le Don*key!* But you would never know it from her manner to him, — though he seems satisfied, and, after all, they 're the ones to be suited. The truth of it is, they are both great sticklers for "propriety"! and I suppose they think it is n't the proper thing to make any demonstration of affection. Nora is always telling me that "it is not good form to be demonstrative." As if I care whether it is or not! *I* believe in being natural and honest, though I do try not to be rude or unkind to people I don't care for — I have n't forgotten that awful afternoon in the storm at Endicott Beach! And if I like any one I see no reason why I should n't frankly show it.

"Of course, Nora, I 'm very glad of your happiness," Alice said, after Nora had very calmly informed us that Chad had asked her the momentous question the evening before, and had showed us her engagement ring — a sapphire and diamond — and told us that, "as there was really no reason for waiting," he was very anxious the wedding should be as soon as possible; "but it will be hard for the family to give you up, — the first break in the home circle."

"Well, somebody had to be the first," answered Nora, practically. "But I 'll not be the last, — there will be another wedding in the family before long, unless I am *very* much mistaken."

This was said so significantly that we all looked at her, and Nannie exclaimed in a startled voice: "Who do you mean?" while the warm colour flew to her face and even her ears.

But Nora evaded the question, — as Phil puts it, she "does love to get people on a string." "How can it be otherwise?" she said, laughing, "with so many boys and girls, — you, Nannie, and Betty — "

"I don't wish to get married!" I declared brusquely.

"— and Phil," finished Nora, ignoring my interruption. "Or do you expect they will all be old maids and old bachelors?"

"Both of your brothers may marry," remarked Alice, shaking her heavy hair farther over her face.

"Oh, not Felix," Nora said quickly, before Nan could speak. "Phil certainly will — in a year or two, when he gets the junior partnership that he is working so hard for; then he 'll have some prospect of supporting a wife. And one of these fine days Jack even may choose him a mate, but Felix will never marry. Why, how could he? — a poor, helpless fellow!"

It suddenly flashed on me that Nora was saying this with a motive. "Fee is n't *nearly* so helpless as he used to be," I broke in hastily. "I am sure he is improving, — he may get perfectly well. Don't you think so, Nannie?"

"Oh, *could* he?" cried Alice, bending forward impulsively.

"Why, of course he could n't," Nora exclaimed. "Felix will never be anything but an invalid — "

Nannie turned sharply on her. "Nora, you are cruel!" she cried out, and those soft brown eyes of hers flashed.

"Oh, I know you don't like to hear it; but it is the truth, all the same. Now Phil is just as well and strong as Felix is weak and delicate."

"The doctors thought that Fee would not get over that attack, — they never dreamed he would ever be able to accomplish what he has lately," Nannie said, pointedly addressing her remarks to Alice and me. Then she added slowly, honestly, dear Nan! "But — while *I* am not willing to call him an invalid — Fee is very far yet from being a well man — and I hardly dare hope that he ever will be that — " Her voice died away sadly. I know what it must have cost her to say that.

Then Alice surprised us. Putting her hair away from her

face with her two hands, she looked straight up at Nannie. "Suppose Felix *is* an invalid, and remains so all his days," she said quietly, though her breath sounded a little short, "does that necessarily debar him from having a wife and home of his own? If the — girl — cared enough to devote herself to him — "

"Oh, but he would not accept such a sacrifice, — for sacrifice is just what it would be," hastily interrupted Nora, with a fine air of virtuous indignation. "Felix will never marry unless he gets perfectly well. He told Phil that *him*self — the night of the fire. Jack heard him say it, too — and *you* know it, Nannie."

So that was Jack's "secret"! Poor Fee!

We looked breathlessly at Nannie, and Alice's eyes asked plainly the question that was in both our minds. "He did say that," was her reluctant admission.

"Do you think — he meant it?" asked Alice, in the same low, quiet voice.

"I think he did." I know Nan hated to say the words.

"Betty, you must be tired standing all this time!" exclaimed Alice, suddenly. "How selfish of me! Do sit down, you poor, tired child, and I will do a little brushing. Thank you, ever so much!" She caught a brush from me with her left hand, and began brushing her hair vigorously, with a little smile on her lips. But when her fingers touched mine they were deadly cold.

"I hope no girl will ever care for Fee in that way; he is so clever, you know — and it would be *such* a pity — for her — " began Nora, in a tone of voice that made me fairly boil.

"Better label him 'Dangerous;' that might avert the catastrophe," put in Alice, with a little mocking laugh.

"It *is* a pity when a girl cares for some one who does not, or is unable by circumstances to make that affection the great blessing of his life; but it is no disgrace to her," cried

Nannie, warmly. "To love a good man, whether he return that love or no, cannot fail to elevate and strengthen any girl's character; if she bear the trial in the right way — bravely, patiently — " Nan's cheeks were very red, she held her head high, with a sweet, half-proud, half-sad little smile on her lips; and her dear brown eyes looked lovingly at Alice.

Rap, rap! came a knock, and Miss Marston's head appeared inside the door. Judging from her queer coiffure, she had retired for the night; but we had weighed on her mind. "Girls," she said in a solemn whisper, "do you know it is after *eleven* o'clock? You will none of you feel willing to get up for breakfast to-morrow morning." And then she vanished.

Nannie and Nora bade a hasty "good-night," and skurried away; and I flew about and helped Alice undress.

I put out the light and lowered her window, and did one or two other little services for her, then went away. But when I was outside the door a sudden impulse sent me back to her bedside. "Alice, where are you?" I said, groping over the pillow to find her. "I want to kiss you again."

Then my hand touched her face, and I knew she was quietly crying.

"Oh, Betty! I want my mother," she sobbed, as I put my arms round her and drew her close to me. "I am just heartsick to-night for my dear mother!"

X.

TEMPTATIONS—

TOLD BY BETTY.

"OH, girls! another invitation! — you 're all going to a *ball!* Mrs. Blackwood 's going to give a ball this year instead of a reception!" cried Kathie, rushing into the school-room one afternoon in a high state of excitement.

"Who said so?" "When is it to be?" "Am *I* to go?" asked Nora, Alice, and I in one breath.

"Yes; Mrs. Blackwood says she wants you *all* to come," asserted Kathie. "And it 's going to be *per*fectly lovely! Oh, I *do* wish I was grown up!"

"Well, you need n't, if you think by that that you would be allowed to go to this ball," I remarked feelingly. "If Nora makes a fuss about there being 'three Misses Rose in society at one time,'" I mimicked her tone, "what would it be with four?" Nora has been so disagreeable about this that more than once I 've just taken the initiative and insisted on staying at home, "for peace' sake," as Jack says, and to keep Nan from giving up her place to me. Dear old Nan! *She* would n't care if there were sixteen Misses Rose, she would head the file just as willingly and serenely, — more so, in fact, for then she would be sure that none of them were at home, cheated out of an evening's enjoyment.

"Oh, now I don't mind so much there being three of us," said Nora, with a little smile and a glance at her engagement ring. "But really, girls, it *is* embarrassing when there are so many of the same name to introduce — Miss Rose number one — Miss Rose number two — Miss Rose number three —

by the time one gets to number *four* the family seem 'legion.' I warn you beforehand that *I* shall invite you to my house one at a time, — I mean for dinners and receptions, — public functions, you know."

Nora's consequential tone, her patronising, pat-you-on-the-back air were *too* killing! and off I went into a spasm of laughter. Alice's lips were twitching, — I know that only politeness kept her face straight.

"You had better take care or I may not invite you at all," remarked Nora, bridling up.

"*You* had better take care or I may not accept your invitations," I retorted, wiping the tears off my cheeks. "Thank goodness, I can get dinners at home."

"But you 'll have *me* come and *stay* with you, won't you, Nonie?" questioned Kathie, anxiously. "Then we 'll go driving together and shopping, and have a *lovely* time, won't we? O o-h!" She flew at Nora and hugged her rapturously. "Ah! there comes Nannie! Is n't it true, Nan, that Mrs. Blackwood has asked Alice and the girls to her ball?"

"And are we all going?" I put in.

"We have all been invited — for the 23d — and as far as I can say now, we are all going," Nannie answered. "And you, Betty," she went on, with a little nod at me, "are to have a brand-new gown for the occasion. I know you won't be sorry. Miss Marston and I have been talking it over, and we agree that you deserve something pretty for wearing those two old made-over frocks of yours so long, and without a murmur."

"'And ye shall walk in silk *attire* — silk *attire* — silk *attire*,' tuli ruli — ruli lilu!" I sang, and, catching Alice by the waist, I waltzed her wildly round the room until our breath gave out.

"I am sure they were almost perfectly good when I gave them to her," declared Nora, in an injured tone. There being such a tribe of us and no over-abundance of money, we

younger ones sometimes have to finish wearing out our elders' clothes, — much to the disgust of some members of the family! And in such cases, as we are nearly of the same height, Nora's gowns fall to me, and Nan's to Kathie.

"That blue and white was my pet best gown for — well, for almost two winters," went on Nora, impressively; "and I kept it *beau*tifully. And now in less than half that time Betty has made it look like an old rag. And as for that serge —" Words failed her.

"Well, you see, you are a goddess," I informed her; "you can glide between the rain-drops, and float over mud-puddles, and literally soar above accidents. You never by any chance tear your clothes or spill things on them, or have them go to pieces on you. But I am not 'built that way,' — you need n't open your eyes at me, I know that is slang. You would stand a whole evening rather than crease your gown; I would n't stand ten minutes — no matter what gorgeous creation I had on — if I were tired and felt like sitting down. And besides," I caught an appealing glance from Nannie, and changed my tone to a merry, teasing one, "if I wore your gowns as carefully and long as you wear them, — think how Kathie and the neighbours would suffer!"

"Absurd!" exclaimed Nora, snippily; while Kathie turned a startled face on me.

"What's that about me?" she began; but I went right on, —

"Not having been worn to a thread in my service, the aforesaid garments would be passed on to Katharine, and, as we are not a wasteful family, she would be compelled to finish them up, willy-nilly, regardless of such trifles as complexion, style, or fit. That 's her part of the agony. Now think of the state of mind of the neighbours as they watch these same garments going in and out of this house winter in and winter out, disporting themselves on the streets, meandering through the park — think, I say, of their depressing

struggle to identify the wearer. No sooner are they positive you are you than they discover that I am you; just as their poor minds are beginning to rest on the fact of that *great* metamorphosis, hey, presto! comes another. I vanish, and they have to identify Kathie. And between your clothes, Nora, and Nannie's, which she 'd also have to appear in, why, Kathie would very soon come to be regarded as no person in particular, — just a composite of we three. I therefore deserve *praise*, not blame. Any chocolates around? I feel the need of something sustaining;" and I fell, as if exhausted, on the old sofa.

"You *are* a goose!" cried Nannie, laughing, while Alice ran to me and poked a chocolate drop between my lips.

Nora never smiled. "You *do* exaggerate, Betty," she said, with a slow, pitying shake of her head, — she takes some things so literally, — "when you know as well as I do that only now and then have you to wear any gown of mine, and that it is always made up differently — completely changed, in fact, before you go out in it. I should feel sorry for the person who expected to wear your things after you were through with them."

"Which means that I am very thorough — thanks awfully!" I murmured, between bites of my chocolate.

"Now, girls, *do* help me settle about this gown," put in Nannie hastily, shaking an admonitory finger at me behind Nora's back. "Would n't you like white, Betty? You know it can always be freshened up so nicely with different-coloured trimmings. And can you think of a pretty way to have it made, Nonie? You always have such nice, original ideas."

"But my ideas might not suit Betty. Better let her plan her own gown," answered Nora, on her dignity.

Now I love pretty things as well as anybody does, and though it never bothers me in the least if my sleeves don't stick out or lie down at just the fashionable angle, or if

there 's a wrinkle or two in the waist of my gown, still I like to look nice. But I doubt if I ever should, were n't it for Nannie and Nora ; I never seem to know what to get, or how I want it made — and I *detest* being "tried." I can walk miles, ride a wheel, row a boat, and play tennis or golf — any or all of them in the same day — and not feel one whit the worse. But one morning of "trying on" reduces me to a perfect wreck, and my sole idea becomes to get through the ordeal as quickly as possible, regardless of what the gown might look like afterward.

But Nora won't permit that. She always superintends the fitting of our clothes, and she *will* have everything just *so*. She plans all her own things and ours, and they certainly turn out very pretty — I 'm always delighted with mine — when the agony of having them made is well over ! As Phil puts it, Nora rather "owns" us at these — what she calls "designing" times ; still, all things considered, she is pretty good, too, — *very* good, in fact, for it must be no end of trouble and nuisance. There are so many of us girls that it seems to me some one or another is always wanting something new.

On other points Nora and I do not always agree, but when it comes to clothes I am like a lamb in her hands, — barring the "trying on." I know she has more taste in dress than I have, and I do really appreciate her efforts to make me presentable, — I could n't imagine a greater trial than having to do all that for myself. So when she supplemented her last remark with : "Anyway, as I shall not be at home much longer, this would be a good time for Betty to begin to look after her own things," I swallowed the last of my chocolate and arose in haste from the sofa.

"Don't harrow up my feelings in that ruthless fashion," I cried out in alarm, rushing to her side. "I can flourish an Indian club and wield a tennis racket with anybody ; but I *cannot* struggle with the intricacies of a gown. If you desert

me in this base fashion I tell you frankly there 'll be nothing left me but to wrap myself in the American flag, or some other material that lends itself easily to drapery. And you will none of you like *that!*" I finished with a tragic gesture.

"I believe you are capable of it," asserted Nora; but I thought I saw signs of her coming round.

"I did exaggerate just now," I went on meekly; "but 'please your majesty, mum,' those remarks were intended for what Alan calls a j-o-a-k. In future, should I ever be daring enough to attempt anything of that sort again, I shall be careful to inform the public that 'This is a joke,' so no one's little feelings may be wounded! It is *very* trying to be misjudged!" I sniffled plaintively, and wiped my eyes with the ruffle of the sofa-cushion.

Alice and Kathie giggled; but Nannie got up to leave the room. "Well," she said decidedly, "I was in hopes, Nora, that you would have gone out with Betty, and bought the material for this gown. Now, I shall have to go myself; not to-day — I must give the rest of the afternoon to papa — but perhaps early to-morrow morning."

"Oh, but you can't go to-morrow morning, — we have an engagement with Mr. Warwick," I reminded her. "Perhaps," I added dubiously, "I *could* get the stuff myself. What shall I ask for? If I should n't buy the right thing do you suppose I would be allowed to change it?" That, to use one of Phil's phrases, "just fetched" Nora!

"I suppose I had better go, — you would be sure to get the wrong material," she remarked, with a candour which I did not mind in the least just then. "Get on your things — and do pay attention to what I do, and see if you can't learn something. Alice, won't you come with us?"

"Good girl! now the success of the gown is insured!" cried Nannie, kissing her fingers to Nora, as she ran out of the room.

"Oh, *dear!* you 're all going out, and I have to stick in

this old school-room and just study — study!" bemoaned Kathie. "I *wish* I was grown up, and could have party-gowns, and be in the jolly, good times you girls are all having!"

"Never mind, Katharine! Remember, 'Every doggie has his day.' That 's vulgar, but encouraging. Your turn will come. Cheer up!" And with these parting remarks I flew out of the school-room and after Nora and Alice.

Kathie had truly said that we were having "jolly, good times;" and all, in a way, brought about by our new acquaintance, Mr. Warwick, or the "Honourable Gorge," as we call him among ourselves, after Alan's style of pronunciation. He made his call on papa the day after his visit with us in the school-room; and in a very short time he managed to make us all feel toward him as if he were an old friend. That first evening he said that his stay in New York would be short, as he intended travelling about our continent and out to California, where he was to meet a party of friends and go through the Yosemite. But week after week passed, and still he stayed on, and we all liked him too well to object in the least. Besides to papa, he had brought letters of introduction to the Van Burens and the Blackwoods; and between them and the Unsworths, and Max and Mrs. Derwent — who had taken him up too, — there was always something going on. We were asked to all these affairs; and it got so that we saw Mr. Warwick almost every day, either at our house, where he paid constant visits, or at the house of one of our friends.

Then, too, he gave a theatre party, with Mrs. Derwent as chaperone, and a dinner at the Waldorf, with Mr. and Mrs. Van and papa along, to counterbalance the frivolity of the younger members of the party. Altogether, it was the gayest time I have ever had, and I enjoyed it immensely!

After going with the others several times, I stayed at

home one evening. It was one of the occasions when Nora objected to the "three Misses Rose." "Besides," she informed me, "you have only one evening gown, and if you go every time you are asked people will get sick and tired of seeing it." So, though I did n't want to do it one bit, "for peace' sake" I gave in, and spent that evening in the schoolroom with the children and Felix. Under the plea of his rapidly increasing law-work, Fee kept out of most of the gayety.

Well, it seems that Mrs. Derwent was quite disappointed at my non-appearance; and who should come posting round to the house the next morning but Mr. Warwick, determined to find out "the reason why." And I was just as determined he should not, — I did n't want him to know of Nora's share in the matter.

"But I thought you loved to dance, — most girls do," he insisted, when I had turned the question off two or three times. "I hope you 're not going to drop out in this way every now and then; why, it knocks the whole pleasure out of the evening, you know."

This was such strong language that I eyed him suspiciously. "I wish you would promise me to be at all the other fandangoes that may come up," he went on. "Remember, I may n't be here very long." His tone was so melancholy that I had to laugh.

"That reminds me of Nurse," I said, "when the children have been very naughty and she wants to bring them to a proper state of contrition, she says, in the most 'harrowing' tone imaginable, '*N-e-v-er* mind, *you 'll* be sorry one of these days — when I am dead and gone!'"

He laughed, but persisted — "I wish you would promise."

"Oh, I could n't do that," I answered lightly. "Why, if I should, I am such a perverse creature I 'd immediately want to stay away altogether." Then, looking seriously up

at him, I said solemnly, "There *is* a reason why I must be absent now and then. Can you keep a secret?" He nodded eagerly. "I have but *one* evening gown," I went on, shaking my head sadly, — "that old blue thing in which I have appeared on all the late festive occasions, and — "

"That blue and white arrangement?" he exclaimed, interrupting me. "Why, it's the stunningest frock I ever saw! Suits you down to the ground! you could n't have anything more becoming. You know 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever.' *Don't* go in for anything else, I beg of you; just stick to the blue and make us all happy."

"Ah, but you forget — the gown would wear out!" I declared, opening my eyes at him in reproachful rebuke. "*Then* not one dinner or dance more this winter for poor me!"

He pulled the ends of his mustache, and looked thoughtfully at me. "And you ought to have the very best that money could buy," he remarked emphatically. He took my nonsense so seriously that I was ready to shout with laughter. "Poor child!" he went on. "What did you do with your lonely little self all last evening?"

I do hate to have anybody I like put on that sentimental tone!

"Oh," I said carelessly, "I upset most of the furniture in the school-room" (I did n't tell him that the children helped me — in a game of Stage Coach) "by way of relieving my feelings. I did think also of tearing my hair, but concluded that would hurt too much."

"Betty Rose! what *are* you saying?" cried Nora, coming into the room just in time to hear these remarks. "Mr. Warwick, I hope you have discovered before now that my sister is fond of saying things to shock people."

The Hon. R. G.'s face got red, though he smiled good-naturedly. "It's too bad of you, Miss Betty, to make fun of your friends," he said, as he rose to shake hands with

Nora. But I was tired of him and the subject, and soon after slipped out of the drawing-room, leaving Nora and Alice to entertain him.

I don't know if anything more was said about my absence the evening before, but I do know that I went to all the other festivities. For Nora, though she still indulged in her little grumble about the "three Misses Rose," seemed to wish me to go, — you may be sure I did n't need a *great* deal of urging!

And, as I said, I enjoyed the fun immensely. For one thing, instead of being paired off, as usual, with one of our boys, and being rather in the background, I got as much attention as anybody. Mr. Warwick was especially kind; no matter where we were or how much in demand he might be, he always made time for a dance or two (sometimes more) with me; several times he took me in to dinner; and we had chats without number. We got on famously together; he was so good-natured and jolly that I felt perfectly at home with him, and talked almost as freely to him as I would have to Jack. From that first evening in the school-room, when we laughed together over my unexpected quotation, I felt that he liked me, but I thought it was in the way that Murray Unsworth does, or the other boys that come to our house. Once in a while he would put on that sentimental tone that I despise, but it never lasted long, for I always made fun of him. Of course, I liked his being nice to me, but I did n't do or say *one* thing to encourage him to care for me; such a thought never entered my head — until that night of the ball! And now I shall always have that contemptible, shameful behaviour of mine to remember!

Well, the gown was bought and made, and I must say that Nora was awfully nice about it. She planned and directed, and took so much trouble to have everything turn out well, that I really felt sorry for her, and was her willing slave for

the time being. And the result was the "swellest" gown I have ever had. It was white — of some soft, thin, shimmery stuff — and so pretty that I was delighted, though I had my doubts about its lasting to be "freshened up" very often, as Nannie suggested, delicate textures and I do not get on well together.

Is n't it wonderful what a difference fine clothes can make in a person's appearance? I was perfectly astonished at the reflection which met me in the mirror when I was dressed for the Blackwood ball, — like the little old woman in the nursery rhyme, I actually wondered if I were I.

"There, now, you are ready!" Nan said in a tone of relief, as she gave a finishing touch to my gown and handed me my gloves and fan. "Do go down in the drawing-room, Miss Elizabeth, and put your gloves on there, — that will give us more room here."

Things *were* pretty crowded: four girls dressing; Kathie and Mädel so engrossed in all that was going on that they were continually in the way, and almost underfoot sometimes; Judge and Alan, first in one room, then in the other (only the politeness due a guest saved Alice an invasion), sitting on two chairs with their hands in their pockets, deeply interested in watching what Judge called "the progress of a toilette," commenting freely on all they saw and in a perpetual state of giggle; and Miss Marston and Nurse — fussy, bound to help, though not knowing how — intensely jealous of one another, and keeping a sharp lookout that one was n't allowed a single privilege more than the other. So, though I should like to have remained, after a vain attempt to persuade the boys to go with me, I went downstairs, thus reducing the crowd by one.

"Now, Betty, *don't* sit on every chair there is in the drawing-room and get your gown all creased before we even start," admonished Nora, as I sailed through her apartment on my downward way.

No one was in the drawing-room, it was too early to put on my gloves, and there was absolutely nothing to do. Never had the piano-stool and the chairs and sofas looked so inviting! Standing at the piano, I played a bar or two of the accompaniment of a song, and wished I had on my old blue and white gown, that I might sit down and sing it through; then I thought of the mirror and concluded I would go over and get a good look at myself.

Now, usually I 'm not what *I* call a pretty girl, though I have often longed to be, — Nannie and Nora are the beauties of the family, — so no wonder that I was fascinated by the radiant young person I saw in the mirror. Such pink cheeks, such bright eyes I had never owned before. I gazed at myself in astonished admiration, going over each feature, each detail of costume eagerly yet fearfully, lest the unaccustomed vision should vanish from my sight. As a test of its reality, I put up a finger and touched my face, my hair, watching the girl in the glass closely, to be sure that she did the same. Then a strange, new feeling of exultation took possession of me, my heart swelled with pleasure. "Oh, you *pretty* thing!" I cried out. Perfectly carried away with delight, I threw a kiss to my reflection. I caught up my skirts and danced to it, making sweeping courtesies, laughing at it, tossing my head to it.

"Hullo! Why! what 're you doing?" cried Jack in amazement, coming up behind me. "Well, I declare, Betty! — *admiring* yourself!"

"How d' you like me? Will I do?" I asked, wheeling round on him.

Jack opened his eyes wide. "My! but are n't you fine!" he exclaimed. He hastily put something he had been holding down on a chair, and came back for a closer inspection. Now usually what he had said would have fully satisfied me, but to-night I wanted more, — I wanted a compliment. With this object in view, I revolved slowly before him, and called

his attention to the beauty of my new gown, throwing at the same time constant glances at the mirror, so as to lose no movement of the white-clad figure reflected there.

But Jack eyed me in solemn silence.

"Why don't you say something," I broke out impatiently, "instead of standing there staring like an owl? Don't you *see* how well I look to-night? Are n't you glad that now you have three pretty sisters instead of two?" I wanted the compliment, but I *was* ashamed of this speech, though when the blood came rushing to my cheeks I threw my head up defiantly.

"Well," said Jack, reluctantly, "you've got on a new frock, and I suppose it 's what you call becoming — if that is what you want to hear. But I like the blue and white thing you have been wearing better. I don't like this, — you don't look the same Betty."

"I 'm *not* the same Betty," I asserted boldly. "A fairy godmother has waved her wand over me, and to-night I am a beautiful, enchanted princess going to a delightful ball where I shall meet and dance with a charming fairy prince who will, *of course*, fall *desperately* in love with me." I spread out my gown and made him a sweeping courtesy.

"H'm!" remarked Jack, with a grin and a quickness I had n't expected of him. "The fairy-godmother threw in a large pinch of self-conceit, too, did n't she? I would like to see this fairy prince. Does he dress in white, and wear top-boots and a tail, like the Marquis de Cabaras? What 's his name?"

"He is a Prince Charming, and he is called — Warwick." It happened to be the first name that came to my mind, and out it popped.

"Oh!" Jack suddenly reached for the something he had laid on the chair when he came in. "Nora opened this by mistake just now," he said; "she thought Chad had sent



"'How d' you like me? Will I do?'"

them. But it turns out they are for you — from Mr. Warwick. There 's his card."

"They" proved to be a bunch of the most exquisite half-opened Malmaison roses. "Oh, how lovely! How *per*fectly lovely!" I cried out, plunging my nose among the flowers and sniffing up their dewy fragrance. "*Delicious!*" The 'Honourable Gorge' is a duck! he is a gem! he is a person of infinite taste! Yes, he certainly *must* be the fairy prince." It was the first attention of this kind that I had ever received; I liked it — it was in perfect keeping with that new, radiant Betty I had just become acquainted with, and I laughed aloud in sheer glee.

Jack looked very far from smiling. "Now, Betty, do be serious for a few minutes," he said, with that worried expression on his face that I 've told you of before. "I want to speak to you about something *very* particular;" and he turned to take a seat.

But I flew at him. "No, no, no! you 're *not* to sit down," I declared, clutching him. "I can't — I promised Nora I would n't — and *you* sha'n't. It is n't polite for a gentleman to sit while a lady stands. What *would* become of your manners without me to look after them?"

"Oh, pshaw!" Jack said impatiently; he wriggled out of my grasp and, supporting himself against a high-backed chair, began his remarks. "I thought I 'd speak to you about this Mr. Warwick," he said — as if we knew a half-dozen or so of the name. "Betty," he went on feelingly, meanwhile eyeing me severely, "what 's that fellow hanging around here for all the time and sending you flowers? I *don't* like it; and I should think you would have more sense, — a man that lives away off in England, where we would n't get a sight of you year in and year out! We 've lived together all these years, *so* happily" — our numerous squabbles were evidently forgotten — "and *I* say that outsiders should not be allowed to come in and break up the family. What 's

the use of having sisters if they all go off and leave you? Why, it is a downright shame! There 's Nora will be walking off with Chad in a month or two; and if you — But you won't go, will you, Betty?" glancing most appealingly at me. 'I should miss you *awfully*. And besides," he drew nearer, and dropped his voice to a tragic whisper, — "besides, Nurse says that her brother's wife's cousin — or some such relation — was once lady's maid to a Countess Somebody or other in England, and what do you think! her husband *used to beat her!* Of course I don't say Warwick would ever do such a thing; but it worried me, and I thought I 'd tell you."

"I would n't advise anybody to go in for that line of treatment with me," I remarked. "*I* am the possessor of MUSCLE!" stretching out my right arm and fingering my biceps with pride.

During Jack's long speech I had been first intensely amazed and then highly entertained. The serious way in which he takes himself and others always amuses me, and I laughed. But now, looking up at the tall boy bending anxiously toward me, it suddenly came to me that I *dearly* loved him, — the kind, patient, worried face, and even the stiff little scalp-lock that stood rampant on his head. I forgot all about my new gown and the radiant Betty I had seen in the mirror. "Jack!" I cried out, in a tone of alarm, "bend your head — quick!" and as he ducked it in nervous obedience, I flew at him and kissed him soundly.

He had n't expected any such demonstration; the consequence was our noses bumped, and the kiss landed somewhere on one of Jack's eyebrows. But it was a relief to my feelings.

"You *are* the roughest girl!" he declared ungratefully, rubbing his nose; while I flew to the glass to assure myself that mine was uninjured.

"I would n't wear those flowers if I were you, Betty," Jack advised, still holding on to his wounded member.

"Indeed, I shall." I declared, catching them up. "They are entirely too beautiful to blush unseen. Oh. dear, *dear!* there come the girls and papa and everybody — and I am not ready! Oh! *where* is my coat, or wrap, or whatever it is I am to wear? Here, Jack, make yourself useful — put it round me."

XI.

— AND DANGERS.

TOLD BY BETTY.

"SO you got a bouquet too," Nora said, when we reached the Blackwoods', while we were taking off our wraps and giving last touches and pats to our gowns and hair before going downstairs. "H'm! And such beauties, too! — I thought Chad was extravagant enough about roses," glancing at her own bouquet; "but those are even finer. Well," with a funny little air of settling the matter, "*I* like Mr. Warwick, — I think he would be a decided acquisition to any family. Why are you blushing, Betty?"

"Because I am an idiot, — for no other earthly reason," I answered brusquely. I was so provoked to feel my cheeks getting warmer and warmer, for there was absolutely nothing to blush about.

"Now, Nora, don't tease her," put in Nannie, which struck Alice and me as being so odd that we laughed, — usually *I* am the one that teases Nora!

"I have not the slightest idea of 'teasing' anybody," remarked Nora, with dignity. "But I do hope, Betty," dropping her voice lest the maids should hear, "that you realise what an opportunity this may be for you. I'm sure he is just as nice and agreeable as he can be, besides having plenty of money; and by and by a title — I don't know if it is a baronetcy or something higher; but anyway his wife would be Lady Warwick, — what more could any girl want?"

"What a pity that you had taken Chad before he arrived!" I said provokingly. "Could n't you possibly arrange the matter now?"

"Stop, girls! I don't think such talk is nice," declared Nan. "Come, we ought to go down."

The large rooms were ablaze with light, and fragrant with flowers; and so full of gaily dressed people that at first I was quite content merely to look on. But after a while, when Chad had claimed Nora, and Nannie and Alice were flying around the room with Max and Phil in a delightful waltz, a feeling of being neglected stole over me. I was positively aching for a dance, my feet were beating time with the music; but none of the men I knew were to be seen, and of those near by, not a creature asked me. My spirits fell flat; I felt, with poor little Glory McWhirk, "Sech lots o' good times in the world, and I ain't in 'em!" and a supreme contempt came over me for a certain young person that I had seen in the mirror at home and considered so fascinating — irresistible. What a conceited, silly creature I had been, to admire myself in that fashion! Well, evidently no one else felt inclined to go wild over my appearance; as far as any attention I was receiving was concerned, I might as well have been at home as standing there in that ball-room with papa and Felix.

They were close beside me, but so deeply engrossed in talking to each other that I got not a word from either. Papa hates dances and balls and affairs of that sort; had not Mr. and Mrs. Blackwood been very old friends that dear mamma had cared for, I know he would never have set his foot there that evening. At first he stood with his shoulders hunched up, leaning against the wall, looking as uncomfortable, to quote Phil, as "a fish out of water;" an intensely bored expression was on his face as he gazed now at the floor, now at the blazing chandelier or the ceiling. The gay crowd around him, the flying figures of the dancers, might have

been thin air for all the notice he took of them. I knew he was n't enjoying himself any more than I was; I appreciated the situation and sympathised with him, though I concluded I had better not say so.

I think Felix must have noticed papa's abstraction, too, for, breaking off an animated conversation with some man who had buttonholed him, he came back to us, and devoted himself to papa with such success that pretty soon they were discussing the successor to the Fetich in the most interested manner, forgetting all about poor lonely me, right at their elbow.

I stood it as long as I could; then, in a little lull which occurred while papa stared at the floor with knitted brows, trying to recall some particular fact or statistic, I gave Fee's coat-sleeve an impatient little twitch. "Do say something to me," I begged in a hurried undertone. "I 'm having the *stupidest* time! I declare I would rather be at home. I think you *might* talk to me too."

"What shall it be about?" asked Fee, in the same low tone and with a broad smile. "Chaldeans or the Hittites, or early Egyptians and Hindus? Those are the subjects the *pater* and I have been waxing eloquent over, and you may take your choice." Then, perhaps seeing that I looked dejected, he added kindly: "Too bad you 're not dancing! I can't think where Murray and the rest of the fellows are. Unfortunately," with a little deprecating arch of his eyebrows, "I 'm not worth much on an occasion of this kind, — being, perforce, a wallflower. Still," glancing about him for an opening in the crowd, "if you will talk to the *pater* I 'll go hunt up some of the people we know."

Ever since that Jermyn-Duff lawsuit *I* think that Fee's health has been improving, though the rest of the family don't seem to notice it. For one thing, he rarely uses a crutch now, depending almost entirely on his cane, which seems to me a big advance, and he is certainly less nervous

about going around alone. But he is still very unsteady on his feet, and I knew it would be a risky thing for him to attempt to make his way through that crowd and on that slippery ball-room floor. I think he rather dreaded it himself, though he would have gone if I had let him, — that 's just like Fee!

" No, indeed, you are not going," I said hastily. " I am not so desperately anxious for partners that you need to go and hunt them up for me. If you bring anybody I 'll *not* dance with him, and your trouble will all be for nothing. Stay here and talk to me about those dear, *wildly* exciting, *deeply* interesting " — I caught my breath and clasped my hands in mock ecstasy — " Ancients ! "

Felix eyed me. " Betty, you 're a humbug ! " he said, the corners of his mouth widening. " I see through you, miss. You 're afraid I may make a spread-eagle — "

" The name in hieroglyphics is *Kem*," broke in papa, taking up the conversation just where he had dropped it, and perfectly unconscious of interrupting any one, " similar to Coptic appellations now used by the natives, — *chame*, *chemi*, *keme*, 'black'; and a cognate Arabic word means 'black mud.' To my mind — "

But we lost the rest, for just then Mrs. Andrewes, Mrs. Blackwood's daughter, came up leaning on the arm of a tall, white-haired, wise-looking man whom she introduced to us as Professor Keene.

Papa's face lighted up. " Author of the 'Sources and Tributaries of the Nile '? " he exclaimed; then, holding out his hand with a cordiality that surprised us, " I am happy to meet you, sir. Your excellent and valuable work has been of the greatest service to me."

" The pleasure of this meeting is mutual, I assure you," responded the new-comer, with equal warmth. " I have read your History with deep interest, and I should like to discuss with you one or two of the points you take up. Your re-

marks on the origin of the Hebrew tongue in the early Phœnician are especially clear and convincing. Now, Higginson — "

"Ah! yes — Higginson!" papa said, glancing anxiously about him. "If we could have a little quiet conversation — "

"You know where father's small smoking-room is, Professor Rose," put in Mrs. Andrewes, kindly. "You two gentlemen go there and have your quiet talk. It is out of the way; I don't think any one will be apt to disturb you. Don't trouble about the girls, Mr. Rose," she added. "Mother and I will look after them." But I doubt if papa heard her, as he went posting off, bumping up against some one at every other step, Professor Keene close behind him. I doubt if he even remembered our existence just then, much less our being at the ball under his care.

"The *pater* will enjoy this opportunity," Fee said, looking after the retreating figures with a smile. "He has always admired Professor Keene's book."

"He came here on purpose to meet your father," remarked Mrs. Andrewes. "Why, Betty, my dear, I hardly recognised you when I came up. I have not seen you for over a year, and *sometimes*," with an arch smile at me, "a year works wonders in a girl's appearance. What are you doing in this corner? I will soon change all that. Mr. Seabury," turning to an elderly gentleman who stood near, "give me your arm across the room, will you? I shall be back in a very little while, Betty," smiling at me over her shoulder as she moved away.

"She 's gone to get partners for you; now your good time will begin," said Fee.

I hoped that she was. "But I am not going to leave you alone," I declared. "I know how stupid that is."

"Oh, when I see you launched on the floor, I 'll go back to my red-headed friend," Fee said, indicating the man who had buttonholed him earlier in the evening. "He wants me

to take up a lawsuit for him," he went on confidentially. "It's a pretty big case; and evidently money is no object. I am surprised at his wanting to put the matter in my hands, for, from what I gather, he is a big-wig, and as yet I 'm small fry. But it may be Max's doing, — he is the *best* fellow! Though, come to think of it, Mr. Headley said something about having heard of me from Judge Allison. He was the one that tried the Jermyn-Duff case. This is my fourth law-case since then — you see business is n't falling off." He flushed up, and held his head a little higher.

"I think it 's wonderful, perfectly wonderful, the way you are getting on." I exclaimed. "I think you will be a judge yet, as Phil said. Only, Felix, you should not work so hard. Why, we hardly see you these days — or evenings, either — you are slaving from morning till night."

"Well, if I can't be anything else, I can be useful in my profession," answered Fee; adding earnestly: "Ah, Betty, you don't know what a blessing constant, engrossing *hard* work is sometimes. Hullo! here comes some one that you know."

I looked up, and there stood Mr. Warwick close by, smiling down at me. I should n't wonder if I beamed on him. I was delighted to see him, and — I hate to remember this! — without putting it to myself in so many words I instantly made up my mind that I would not be a wall-flower again *that* evening if I could help it.

His eyes lighted up as they fell on the roses in my hand. "It is so good of you to wear them; I hoped you would, — yourself the sweetest rosebud of them all," he murmured, in what I call his sentimental tone.

Usually I settle that very shortly, but this evening I only made a little *moue* at him, with, "If I am a rosebud, prepare to find me very thorny."

"Here you are demurely hiding in this corner," he went on, "and I've been asking everybody, hunting everywhere,

for you. Have you been dancing? May I put my name down for the next dance and one or two more?" He exclaimed when he saw my empty card. "I 'd like to have them all," he said; and without a word of remonstrance I let him write his name opposite one dance after the other.

But the tide had turned now, for Nannie and Max came up just then, and behind them Mrs. Andrewes and a gentleman whom she introduced and who immediately asked me for a dance. Max, too, wanted one. "You poor, neglected child!" cried Nan; "you have n't been out of this corner — and the floor is so splendid! smooth as a sheet of ice. I am so sorry Max did n't take you first."

But the dull waiting was over; my spirits went up with a bound, and I danced away with a feeling as if floating on air.

After that there was no lack of partners; with a delightful unexpectedness they seemed to spring from everywhere. And they were *so* attentive and complimentary! Besides all wanting to dance with me, whenever I stood resting for a few minutes they collected around me, as I had often seen men do around Nora. It was all very novel to me, though, and at first I felt awkward and embarrassed. I could n't think how to talk to them all, and I kept wondering why they were so very nice and polite to me, — until suddenly I remembered the radiant vision in the mirror at home. Ah! *that* explained the mystery! So, after all, I had not made a mistake. I drew a long breath, and looked about me with a new, delicious sense of power, — oh, how *delightful* to be pretty and attractive and have admirers! I felt sorry for the two plain-looking girls near me who were talking quietly, and apparently so contentedly, to one man. I had often blamed Nora for being self-conscious, and, perhaps, more worldly than the rest of us; but now, glancing across the room at her and Chad, I marvelled (though that I always shall) at her being content to marry that empty-headed, insignificant

little creature. For the first time it occurred to me that with her great beauty she might have made a grand match; perhaps become a duchess, or a countess, or a lady Something or other, — my ideas of English titles were not very clear. Just then I glanced up at Mr. Warwick, and met an expression in his eyes that at any other time would have made me both provoked and uncomfortable. But now the same proud, exultant feeling that had made me dance to the mirror took possession of me, and without the least resistance I gave myself up to it. My shyness vanished, I got in the wildest spirits, and began chattering like a magpie all the foolish speeches that, I know, come so easily to the end of my tongue. I threw coquettish glances, and put on all sorts of silly airs, and laughed and giggled in a way that I simply *hate* to remember.

Deep down in my heart, though, I knew this was n't nice behaviour, and, perfectly regardless of Nan's injunction and Nora's fixed law that I should return to our corner after every dance, I took good care to keep as far from the rest of the family as I could.

I laughed and talked and danced with all, and with Mr. Warwick more than all, for he refused to give up one of the many dances I had allowed him to claim; so he was constantly beside me.

But though I tried to forget the family, it became evident that the family had not forgotten me. First came Rollie Van Buren, then Murray Unsworth, with a message from Nannie for me to return to her; but I put them off gaily and glided away in a waltz. The next messenger, however, was Phil, and with a look on his face that made me conclude, before he said a word, that I would go with him. He offered me his arm politely enough, but I could read the signs, and I knew there was a squall ahead. "Delightful evening, is n't it?" I said, with a determined effort to make conversation, although a slight feeling of uneasiness was beginning to trouble me.

"And such stacks of flowers everywhere — do look at that mass of colour over there."

"If this is the way you intend to behave in public I 'd advise the *pater* to lock you up at home until you get some sense," growled Phil. "The idea of carrying on in that style!"

"If you 're going to be disagreeable and rude I will turn round and take Mr. Warwick's arm; he is right behind us," I retorted, with a movement as if to withdraw my hand from where it rested on his coat-sleeve.

But Phil only pinned my arm closer to his side. "You 've made yourself conspicuous enough with that fellow," he declared, in such a savage undertone that my uneasiness grew rapidly.

"Well, you sent for me — here I am," I remarked airily, as I reached the group in the corner.

"You have behaved *outra*geously, Betty," exclaimed Nora, emphatically, but in a low tone, so as not to be overheard; while Chad twisted one end of his pale mustache and looked curiously at me, as if I were some strange new kind of animal. I was *so* tempted to make a face at him!

I did n't care a rap for his opinion or Nora's. But the expression in Nan's eyes did trouble me; and a sudden heaviness settled on my heart when she said gently, but with that rare coldness that comes into her voice when she is hurt or displeased with us: "It is late — very soon we shall be going home; so I think, Betty, instead of dancing again, you had better stay here with us and rest awhile."

"I 've enjoyed myself, — that is not a crime," I said huffily, turning my back on Chad, and beginning to fan violently. "I thought that was what balls were given for."

"Betty," said Alice from behind me, "here is some one you have n't seen for a long time, — an old friend."

I wheeled round, looking, I am afraid, anything but pleased, and came face to face with Hilliard Erveng!

Now, as the Ervengs did not return to New York after that winter when they lived opposite us, I have only met Hilliard once — for a few minutes — since my visit to Endicott Beach. But he has sent me books and photographs, and has written to me several times while travelling about with his mother in California; he writes nice letters, too, — much better than he talks. So, in a way — though I can't say I 've ever been carried away with admiration of him — I have got to feel quite friendly toward him. And besides I never could forget that awful storm, and how he risked his life for mine. I suppose all this together was what made me feel so glad to see him.

"Why, Hilliard Erveng! where did you spring from?" I cried, with a pleased, merry laugh, — for the moment my annoyances were forgotten, — and out went my hand to him in cordial welcome. Hilliard has always been slow, wooden and formal to a deadly degree; still he has also always been very polite, — I noticed it particularly that month at the Beach. But I must say he was anything but polite *this* evening. Instead of greeting me warmly or at least pleasantly, as I expected, he barely touched my fingers, and so limply that I felt as if *I* were holding on to *his* hand, — I despise that way of shaking hands! And he did n't smile or even look at me, — just stood there with that wooden expression on his face that is so exasperating, and with his eyes almost shut up.

I was *so* astonished! I almost felt as if some one had thrown cold water in my face. "Why — what —" I was going to say, "What is the matter?" but I caught myself in time, and instead laughed.

"They got here late this afternoon — aunt Abby is here, too; at a hotel — we 'll see her to-morrow," put in Alice, hastily. "Mrs. Blackwood knew they were coming; and, finding his invitation waiting for him, Hill came right round, in the hope of meeting us all. He has been here a good

part of the evening. He would n't dance, Betty; but we have been looking at you, admiring you, as you floated over the floor."

Involuntarily I glanced up at Hilliard. I knew Alice meant what she said, but did *he*— For one instant his sleepy eyes opened wide and met mine full, then the heavy lids fell. "Yes," he said, in his slow, deliberate way, "we have been looking at you."

That was all; but it was enough for me, — I understood, as well as if he had said it, what that expression in his eyes meant. He had seen me laughing and dancing and chattering with Mr. Warwick and all those men, and he, too, thought I had been "carrying on"! He was astonished and disgusted with my behaviour; I read it all in that one glance.

For a moment I felt horribly unhappy, — not that I cared so much for *his* opinion, but it is n't pleasant to have people act as if they despised one. Then suddenly I got very mad. What did I care whether Mr. Old Poke approved of me or not? What business was it of his *what* I did?

The colour rushed to my face, and I tossed my head proudly. "I hope you enjoyed looking on as much as I enjoyed dancing," I remarked. "It was simply delicious!" and I sniffed my bouquet with an air of ecstasy.

Just then Mr. Warwick came up to claim the next dance. "No, I can't waltz with you," I said, putting on a most coquettish manner, though all at once I felt dreadfully tired of him. "I am under orders to do no more dancing to-night. I am *so* warm!" fanning vigorously.

"Do let me take you to the conservatory, — it is delightfully cool there," the Honourable R. G. eagerly suggested.

"*I* will take you there, Betty, if you wish to go," came at the same moment in Hilliard's slow tones, right at my elbow.

But I pretended I did n't hear him; a wicked spirit of

perversity got into me. "Oh, that would be delightful! I should like that," I said sweetly; afterward I remembered the keen pleasure that flashed into Mr. Warwick's eyes, but then I was too much taken up with snubbing Hilliard to notice, and, accepting my English friend's arm, I sailed off, ignoring Nannie's low, detaining call of "Betty!" which I heard distinctly.

That conservatory, with its softly shaded, many-coloured lights, its fragrant dewy flowers, and rare, shining-leaved plants, and with the music coming in sweet, wild strains from the ball-room, was, to me, like fairy-land. "Oh, is n't it lovely here!" I said, as we sat down on one of the benches. "I am very glad that I came."

"So am I glad that you are here, — I 've been hoping and watching anxiously all the evening for an opportunity to speak to you alone." Something in his tone — an unusual significance — startled me, and brought me a sudden, sharp uneasiness. "Suppose I should take cold here, — I think we had better go right back," I exclaimed, rising, and, without exactly knowing why, regretting that I had not obeyed Nan's detaining call.

But the time of reckoning had come, and I was not to escape it.

"Oh, don't go, Betty; give me just a few minutes," he pleaded. There was a nervous little tremor in his voice which made me feel very badly when I thought of it afterward; and he caught my hand and gently detained me. "I got a telegram to-night from those friends I am to meet out West," he said. "I have to leave New York to-morrow; I ought to have gone weeks ago, but you know what has kept me, Betty — and it depends upon you — whether I return." And then he said something more — in eager, earnest, manly words that I can never forget, though I could not respond to them as he wanted — as I felt that he *expected* I would!

A curious mixture of feeling came over me; I got frightened, ashamed, and angry all in one. "Oh, stop, stop! Don't say those things!" I cried out vehemently, shrinking away to the end of the seat, and waving my hands at him to quiet him. "Don't talk to me like this — I don't want to hear it."

"*What!*" he said incredulously, starting back. He got up and stood a little distance away, looking down at me; the fun and jolliness had all gone out of his face, it looked pale and determined. "What does this mean?" he asked coldly. "All these weeks you must have seen that I cared — and to-night you showed openly — " He broke off abruptly.

"No!" That was all I could say, for the horrid lump that had come in my throat; and the hand I reached out to the plant near me was as cold as ice.

With a sudden change of manner Mr. Warwick leaned eagerly toward me. "Have I been too abrupt, and frightened you?" he asked very tenderly. "Forgive me — I am a great, rough, blundering fellow, but I love you with all my heart, dear. And this supense is hard to bear. You are so noble, so thoroughly honest and straightforward — I *know* you would never have encouraged me as you have this evening unless there was hope for me. I am not worthy of your love, — no man is, — but I will try to deserve it, — my sweet little white rose."

Mean! I can *never* forget the horrible, utter contempt, loathing, for myself that came over me. All the glamour faded away, and I saw my dishonourable, wicked behaviour in its true light. Oh that I — who had *despised* and been so hard on anything like flirting in other girls, and had prided myself on being perfectly sincere and honest, — that *I* should have done this mean thing! I was mortified beyond expression, ashamed, humiliated to my very heart! Oh, if I could but wake up and find this was all a dreadful nightmare!

But it was no dream, and there was Mr. Warwick waiting to be answered.

I would have been so thankful could I have given him the answer he craved, — the answer my outrageous behaviour had led him to expect. But I *did n't* love him, and a conviction came to me that, were he twice as nice and jolly and rich and titled, — "strung with diamonds from head to foot," as nurse puts it, — I could *never* care any more for him than I did at that moment. I dreaded to say it, but there had been deception enough; now I must tell the truth, and gathering up all my courage I began.

In a headlong, stumbling, incoherent fashion I blurted out the whole miserable story of my vanity; and it was part of my punishment to see the kindliness die entirely out of his eyes and to feel the contempt which took its place.

"I never thought much of girls until I met you," he said, when I had finished, "and you — with all your fun and mischief and teasing — seemed so honest, so perfectly sincere, and above anything like — *this* — that I would have staked my life on your truth. Now I know that you are just like the rest." This was what I had done for my friend!

"Won't you forgive me?" I asked humbly, putting out my hand.

But he refused to take it. "That 's part of the rôle, — is n't it?" he said with a disagreeable smile that was quite new in my experience of him; then, with a sudden emotion that cut me to the heart, "One of these days I may forgive you, Betty, but I can't now — *you* have been flirting — amusing yourself, but *I* have been in earnest. That makes a difference." He straightened up and assumed a cool, calm tone. "Shall I take you to your friends?" And he offered me his arm most ceremoniously.

Just by the conservatory door we met Nannie and Max. "I came to look for you, as we are ready to go," Nannie



"The hand I reached out to the plant near me was as cold as ice."



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said, — I knew by her voice that she was still displeased. "Papa and the others are waiting for us."

"Then I will leave you here," declared Mr. Warwick, and with a few words more he bowed himself away.

I think Nannie must have guessed that something was wrong, from his unusual manner; and she certainly knew it when I caught her arm and pressed it close to me. "Nan," I whispered, with a horrid catch in my voice, — I could hardly keep the tears back, — "oh, take me home just as quick as you can, — I am *so* unhappy!"

Except for one or two remarks, we drove home in dead silence. "Well, I think you have distinguished yourself to-night," Nora began, when we were seated in the carriage and Phil had banged the door to.

But I felt as if I *could n't* stand a word, — 't was just as much as I could do to keep from bursting into a flood of tears right then and there. "If you are going to nag I 'll jump out and walk home," I cried out sharply, — I could hear my voice tremble, and I reached a hand to the carriage door as if to fulfil my threat.

"Dear me! how very high and mighty!" exclaimed Nora, indignantly. She paused abruptly — I think Nan must have touched her to be quiet; and not another word was said until we reached home.

Without stopping to say "good-night," or anything else, I flew upstairs to Nannie's and my room. There was a little whispering on the landing — I heard Nora's voice protesting: "Why can't we be told now? Is it such a mystery?" then, with sudden alarm: "If *she* has *refused* him — !" I could imagine the look on her face! Then Nannie came in and shut our door.

I had pitched my wrap on the first chair I came to, and was tearing up and down the room dragging off my gloves and tossing them recklessly from me, and now, perfectly regard-

less of my new finery. I flung myself down on the side of our bed and burst into a fit of weeping that was equal to anything Kathie herself could have done.

I know Nannie was annoyed with me: but that did n't keep her away, — my darling, blessed sister! I believe if any one of us should do the very worst thing in all the world Nan would still cling to and love that one. Dear mamma herself could n't have been more patient and sweet with us in all these years than Nan has been and is. In an instant she was beside me, her arm across my shoulder, smoothing my hair, soothing me in that dear way of hers.

I just *loved* to have her do it. I appreciated it to my very heart; but for a moment the thought of what I had to tell her made me so utterly wretched that I could only cry the harder. "Oh," I sobbed out miserably, "you w-won't pet me — when you kno-ow what a mean — *ba-ad* — contemptible girl I 've been! Just wait — t-till you hear." Putting her hands resolutely away — though I hated to! — I sat up and gave her the whole story from beginning to end.

Between the eager torrent of words that I poured out, the rush of tears that had continually to be wiped away, and the storm of sobs that *would* not be restrained, I wonder that Nannie understood what I was trying to tell her. But she did, and long before the confession was over her arms were close around me, my head on her shoulder — and I can tell you I hugged her tight! It was such a comfort to feel that, mean and wicked as she knew I had been, she still cared for me! Not a word of reproof or blame did she utter throughout the telling; but all the same I felt, right through her silence, how shocked and grieved she was at my behaviour. And, if anything, that touched me more than if she had scolded.

"Oh, Nan!" I said miserably, sitting up when the story was finished; "is n't it awful to know that, no matter how sorry I am or how deeply penitent for what has happened,

there is no undoing it as if it had never happened. Just as long as we live Mr. Warwick and I will always have this horrible evening to remember. There 's no going back and wiping the whole thing out as if it had never been. Oh, if I could *only* live the evening over, would n't I act differently, though ! I would stay in a corner and be a wall-flower fifty times over without a grumble. I feel so ashamed — and *meaner* than mean ! " The tears rolled faster down my cheeks and fell in my lap.

Nannie drew me to her again. " Ah, dear," she said, rubbing her chin softly against my forehead, as it lay on her shoulder, " now you know one of the saddest of the hard things of life, — the agony of an unavailing regret for an opportunity lost or abused. You can't go back and undo the mischief you wrought this evening, — that is beyond recall, — but if you will, Betty, you can let this experience keep you from such thoughtlessness and vanity in the future. Don't think I mean to be harsh, dearie ; but there are times when, if we want to be helpful, we must speak plainly and call things by their right names."

" Oh, I know it was vanity," I assented mournfully. " I was so delighted to think I looked pretty, and that people — all those men — were showing me attention, that — well, my head got turned — and I acted like a perfect idiot. Oh ! when I *think* of all the *silly* things I said ! — I guess those men were laughing at, instead of with me. I hope I 'll never see one of them again."

We sat quiet for a few minutes ; gradually my tears ceased, and I grew calmer. " Nan," I said presently, " do you think it is wrong to be glad — *real* glad — that one is pretty ? "

" Why, no, indeed ! " cried Nannie, warmly. " Beauty is a great thing to have. It is one of God's ' good gifts.' But it brings a responsibility with it, Betty, just as does intellect, power, riches, or any other great trust ; I believe that

as strict an account will be expected of that when the Last Reckoning comes as of any of those others. Beauty is something to be valued, as a means for good, — to use for good, to help people to be better, as with the beauty of a little child or of the flowers, — but, oh, my dear, never to be proud of, or to become vain or conceited over. Besides being unchristian-like, to my mind, pride of beauty is as low as pride of money."

I might have heard words like these before, very likely I had, but to-night they held a new meaning for me. I lay on Nan's shoulder for a while, cogitating, then I asked another question, slowly, hesitatingly: "Nannie, do you — am I — would you call me — pretty?" I waited anxiously for the reply.

It came promptly. Taking my face between her two hands, Nan looked me straight in the eyes. "Yes," she said simply, "I think you are pretty. And your perfect unconsciousness of this has added to your attraction, — it was like the unconsciousness of a child, I wish it could have lasted. But now that you know of your 'gift,' remember the responsibility it involves. See that you use it only for good, dear."

The little thrill of pleasure which Nannie's first words had excited in me died away, as she ended, in a feeling of alarm. "Oh, dear!" I said anxiously, "I do *hope* I won't get into mischief again! I 'm awfully glad if I am — well, better looking than I used to be — but I would just *hate* to become conceited. And besides, I 'm *so* heedless — when I get to enjoying myself I forget all about rules and regulations so easily." Then, very earnestly, as an idea which I thought excellent occurred to me, "Nan, had n't I better make you a promise not to — you know," I felt the colour fly to my cheeks, "not to — well, to talk and laugh with people — in that — flirty way. I *know* it 's horrid. When I fell in love with myself in the mirror — just like that silly Narcissus in

mythology that I have always despised! — I had no more idea of carrying on as I did than I have of flying this very minute. But if I made you a solemn promise now, I would *have* to remember it. Had n't I better do it?"

But Nannie shook her head at me. "No, Miss Elizabeth," she answered brightly. "I won't have you lean on a promise when you should stand upright on your own feet. You know the difference between right and wrong full well, and I want you to be free to *choose* the good, not to be forced to it by the recollection of a promise. I want you to be strong in the best way, dear. Don't look so dismal, I know you can do it, — ask for help from Above, and, as Phil would say, 'do your own level best here.' Now, don't you think we might take off our finery and go to bed?" She rose, and stood there smiling at me, — a splendid, brave, trusting, encouraging smile that went straight to my heart and strengthened me.

I flew at her and hugged her with all my might. "You *dear!*" I cried out, then suddenly I choked all up. "I can't put into words what you are to me," I managed to say, "but God knows, and when you get to heaven *He* will tell you."

XII.

A DISCOVERY.

TOLD BY BETTY.

THE day after the ball papa got a note from Mr. Warwick, stating that he was suddenly summoned out West, thanking us for all our kindness to him, and regretting his inability to call to bid us good-bye, etc.

I was thankful not to have to see him again; but the knowledge that it was I who had broken up — ended — his friendship with us all, made me very unhappy. For days I felt so miserable and guilty that I could n't smile or take interest in anything. And even now — weeks and weeks after — just the thought of that horrid evening makes me very sober.

I dreaded the remarks of the family; but, for a wonder, not a creature said a word about it — I think Nan must have asked them not to. All the same, though, it was evident that they did n't approve of me. For days Phil scarcely spoke to me, and then his remarks were of the briefest; Felix was stiff and overlooked me, while Nora's superior glances and lofty tones proclaimed what her opinion of me was. I did n't enjoy this, you may be sure; still, it was more endurable than having things said; and, besides, Alice and Nannie and Jack were all right. In fact, I think Mr. Warwick's absence was a great relief to Jack.

"Oh, he was nice enough," he magnanimously admitted one day when he and I happened to be alone in the schoolroom. "But when a person comes over from England on purpose to see California and the Yellowstone, where 's the

sense of wasting time hanging around New York? I think he ought to have gone long ago. Still," he turned his solemn eyes on me, wrinkling up his forehead anxiously, "I do hope, Betty, that you're not going in for — well, for the sort of behaviour you tried at the ball." He had evidently heard something — I declare there is no keeping things quiet in a large family; everybody has just *got* to know everything. "I'd *hate* to have one of my sisters turn out that kind of a girl," he went on steadily, "and particularly you, Betty."

When Jack is studying he has the greatest habit of scratching his head; going gently, meditatively all over it with one hand, while the other holds his book, — Phil says "trying to rub in knowledge," — and the consequence is that he frequently presents, to say the least, a very curious appearance. The more difficult his studies, the wilder becomes the confusion in his hair. This was especially the case this afternoon, and the contrast between his serious, disturbed face and the rakish locks that stood up all over his head was *too* funny!

But for some reason, perhaps because of the wistful expression in Jack's gray eyes, I didn't feel at all like laughing. "You needn't worry yourself about that," I said hastily. "It will not happen again if *I* can prevent it. Nannie wouldn't let me make her a promise about it, but I have promised myself, and — well, I'm going to try to stick to it, though perhaps it'll be harder than keeping a promise to Nannie; I fancy Nan thinks so."

"Oh, yes, it will be harder," remarked Jack, in a tone of conviction. "You see," he went on, in that old-fashioned way of his, leaning confidentially toward me across the table, — "you see, it's this way: When a person makes a promise to some one, he knows that other person will expect — will *rely* on that promise, and it sort of keeps him up to the mark. Some one will suffer or feel hurt or be

disappointed if he does n't keep his word; so it is an actual *obligation*, as well as a matter of honour, to fulfil the promise. See? Now, of course, a promise is a promise, whether to some one else or to one 's self; but when you make it to yourself and no one else knows about it, why — well — it 's *awfully* hard not to let things slide sometimes — particularly when the keeping of the promise means doing something you don't like one bit."

I looked at Jack attentively. "You have tried it?" I asked.

"Yes," he said briefly, bending over his book and going at his head again.

I have always had an idea that I knew — I was going to say — every thought Jack ever had, that he told me everything, and that *I* was the one to lead or guide *him;* but some things that have happened lately are making me change my mind.

I let him study and scratch awhile, then — I had been thinking — I asked, in a meek voice that surprised myself: "Do you mind telling me all about it? I'll not breathe a word to any one; and it — well, it might help me, you know."

Jack whisked over several pages of his book before he answered. "There is n't much to tell," he said shortly. But I just quietly waited, and presently he went on, in a hurried, jerky way, still turning his leaves: "I hate to study — and I hate to trot around and do errands for people — and Nannie said 't was growing on me — so I made a promise to myself that instead of sitting so much on the sofa, reading," Jack cast a longing glance at his favourite resting-place, "I 'd try to — shirk less and do more." He stopped, and gazed at the open page of his book with an air of absorbed attention that was too transparent to deceive me.

"Well, could you do it? Is it hard?" I asked with lively interest.

"Hard? You bet it 's hard!" cried Jack, losing his embarrassment in the recollection. "Why, I 've just had to *roll* myself off that sofa when I was called to do things — And sometimes I have been so mad when I sat down to study that I 've pitched the old things," he gave his book an impatient shove, "on the floor — though of course I had to pick them up again."

"And can you always keep to your promise?" was my next question.

"Oh, *my*, no! I failed 'most every time until" — Jack got very red, and again began scrutinising his page closely — "until I made the promise to — Him." He threw his hand upward, and I understood.

"That helped you?" I asked.

He nodded. "Lots," he answered shortly; then, "He sees, knows everything, — 't was like having the person you had given the promise to along all the time."

"And have n't you *ever* failed since?" I don't see anything in this to annoy anybody, but Jack turned on me.

"See here, Betty, what d' you take me for, — a saint?" he demanded; then, meeting my surprised expression, he rapidly cooled down to his usual tone. "Of *course* I fail, but not quite so often as before."

"But it is so hard to always realise that — Nearness," I remarked gloomily; I felt like Hosea Biglow that day, — "kind o' disj'inted an' all out of sorts."

Jack whisked more leaves over, then shut the book with a slam and turned his eyes on me. "I 'll tell you something," he said earnestly. "Mamma told it to me one day, just before she — you know — went away. I had been in trouble the whole morning, — lessons, laziness, and everything else, — and she was talking about overcoming faults. Speaking of God, she said —" Jack paused and gazed thoughtfully down at the school-room table for a moment. "She said," he continued slowly, a far-away look coming into his eyes,

"not to regard Him as a grand, wonderful, awesome, mysterious Being, seated on a magnificent throne *aw-a-y* off, far above us in heaven, where only the angels could come, but to try always to think of



"Jack gazed thoughtfully down at the school-room table."

Him, and 'specially when I was in trouble or unhappy, as Jesus — for He is God, you know, Betty — and what Jesus was on earth, — full of love, — the kind of love we know here. She said to keep fixed right in my mind that He who came down from heaven was a *real* human person here on earth, — a *real* Baby, a *real* Boy, a *real* Man; that He worked and suffered and had real, every-day trials and temptations just as we have, and had to struggle just as hard as ever I or any other boy could, to overcome 'em, — on purpose so He could understand everything we had to go through and could help us in *everything*.

said that though Jesus was in heaven now, He never for one moment forgot how it was to be a human being, — that He *knows* just *exactly* how hard it is to be good, and that He will help us *every* time if we ask Him. I can't say it as she did, Betty," Jack finished abruptly, "but I know I have felt the truth of it here," he made a hasty motion toward his heart, "and it *does* help." Then he opened his book at random, and became absorbed in it.

I wish I had n't been such a wild, heedless little girl; Jack and Felix and Nannie, even Nora and Phil, remember so much more of dear mamma than I do. While they were with her I was sliding down banisters and climbing fences! I loved her, — many a time I 've stood and peered longingly at her through a crack of the door as she lay on the lounge or bed; but I was — I am still — a clumsy, awkward creature in a sick-room. The others knew far better than I what to do for her; and besides I did n't dream that she was going so soon. I can shut my eyes now and see her face; she was fair and brown-haired — Kathie looks like her — and there were always those pretty red spots of colour on her cheeks — Fee's colour comes like that. I can see every feature as if she were before me; but I have none of those dear, sweet talks with her to remember that Jack and Nannie have, and Fee, — though he rarely speaks of her. And it is all through my own fault.

I was far away from the school-room, the familiar surroundings had all faded out; instead I saw mamma's slender figure lying back in her invalid-chair, her bright, eager face smiling up at papa as I had seen her again and again; I felt her arm over my shoulder; I heard her low gentle voice, — "Betty, dear child." The deep, unutterable love that had so often choked me into awkward silence then, now gripped my heart; and a great longing came over me for mamma. Then suddenly I realised that Jack was speaking to me, and with a start I came back to every-day life.

"Betty," he was saying mysteriously, "it 's back again." While I was trying to collect my thoughts, he drew a long fat envelope from his inside coat-pocket, and after a hasty glance, to be sure that the door was closed, he set the envelope up on edge before him. Around it he spread out several single printed sheets of paper, and sat and looked at all with an expression of great disgust. Then I knew that it was Jack's "Mowgli-ish" story. "St. Nicholas" failed to appreciate its merits; and since then, by my persistent urging, the manuscript had been travelling from one magazine and newspaper to another, but, alas! always to return.

"This makes *eight* times it 's come back," declared Jack, eyeing the fat envelope gloomily. "Think of the postage, the car-fare, and all the bother I 've been to with that old thing, — and what have I got in return? Just the disappointment and those beastly printed circulars that the editors have sent me, — I 've got so I just hate 'em." He filliped his fingers impatiently at the papers and set them fluttering. "What 's the use of writing stories when nobody will publish any of them? I 'm *real* discouraged!" He finished in such a mournful tone that I had to laugh.

"Oh, well, your living does n't depend on them, let us be thankful for that," I said encouragingly. "*I* thought 't was good, but evidently the editors don't agree with me, and they are the ones to settle the matter. You have given the manuscript a fair enough trial, I 'm sure, but nobody seems to want it. Now, if you 'll take my advice, instead of spending any more of our limited cash on it, you will bury the old thing at the very bottom of that rubbish of yours under the sofa and forget all about it. Read stories, if you must, but don't take the bother to write them."

"Oh! but, Betty! you don't understand, — I can't help but write them," exclaimed Jack, with such sharp reproach in eyes and voice that I was astonished. "The stories come into my head and just *stick* there," he went on, growing very

much excited. "In my mind I actually *see* the things happening; and sentences and whole bits of a story come to me as smooth and clear as if I were reading them out of a book. They go through and *through* my head until I can't think of anything else, and keep bothering me when I 'm trying to study. They take right *hold* of me," Jack clinched his hand, "and worry and torment and just tire me until I *have* to sit down and write the whole thing out to get rid of it. I tell you, I 've *got* to write stories," he thumped his fist on the table, "whether anybody ever publishes them or not, — just to get them out of my head. And besides," here the tone of his voice changed, "I love to do it, Betty. I *love* it! You just lose yourself, — you forget everything else while you are making 'em up; you go miles away — all over the world, if you choose — and you feel as if you really *knew* all the characters. They are like real, living people to you. Oh, it 's immense!"

A long-drawn "O-o-h!" was all I could get out; I simply sat and stared at Jack. His cheeks were flushed with a bright colour, his quiet gray eyes had widened and grown actually brilliant, and the expression on his face, eager, alert, almost exultant, reminded me — though he does n't really look one bit like it — of a copy I once saw of the Neapolitan Fisher Boy.

This was a new, most unexpected side of Jack's nature, and I had thought I was acquainted with every phase of it!

The condition he described — how had he ever kept it from me all these years? — was something I did not know, had never felt, and could only imperfectly understand. But the genuineness of his emotion deeply impressed me; I realised that what he had just said came straight from his heart. And strange ideas began to crowd into my mind. What was this strange fascination that Jack talked about? what did it mean? Felix had written stories when he was Jack's age, — though he had never talked about it in this rapt, enthusi-

astic fashion, — and we had all considered that very wonderful; but then Felix was a genius. Greek and Latin and mathematics and law — all study, in fact, was child's play to him. Besides this, Fee was brilliant in conversation; older people — even papa and Mr. Van and other of his learned friends — liked to talk with him. Everybody knew that he was *very* clever. But until now it had not seemed at all strange to me that Jack should write — could it be possible that he was clever too? The thought came with a kind of shock — Jack, who was such a dunce over his lessons, to whom languages and the "science of quantity" were a perpetual agony and slough of despond, who was uncertain in his spelling and not above reproach in his grammar, — it seemed incredible that *he* should be clever. A dear, good, peaceable kind of chap he was, but not clever, — that was absurd; and yet —

I looked at Jack with eyes grown suddenly very observant. "Is this the only story you have?" I asked. "Is it your best — and the one you like best?"

Jack hesitated. "Well," he said slowly, "there *is* one that I like better, but I don't think it 's really as good as this — you know, as a story. It is only about a bird that died trying to save its little ones, how the other birds mourned for him and buried him, and about the animals that came to the funeral. There 's no fighting in it, as in that." He waved his hand toward the travelled manuscript standing on end before him.

"Get it and let me read it," I urged. "Perhaps that would suit some editor better than this."

So Jack went across the room and, turning up the flounce of the old sofa, hauled out all his treasures, and among them a big clumsy-looking bundle of manuscripts, written on paper of all colours, and tied securely together with yards upon yards of what looked like a cast-off clothes-line. He brought the bundle over to the table and untied it, throwing the manuscripts right and left as he hunted through them for the

one he wanted, making remarks about them as he did so. I could see he was enjoying himself immensely. "That one is about poor little Prince Arthur, — the part where Hubert comes to put his eyes out. I 'd been reading 'King John,' and I got so worked up over it I had to write that story. This is an Indian story, — boys fighting Indians. That one 's about Marie Antoinette, and instead of letting her be killed, I made her and the little prince — Louis Capet — oh ! Betty, was n't it *terrible* the way those French people treated them? — well, I just made them escape and come to America, and live here in safety all the rest of their lives. Here 's another about two boys shipwrecked on an island; and that other one is about some more boys, — American boys in a diamond mine in Uruguay, and all their adventures. Tell you! there 's an awful lot of fighting in that." Jack gave the ragged dirty manuscript an affectionate pat. "Ah ! here 't is," pouncing on a roll and bringing it up to light.

"Now, Betty," he continued, taking his seat and spreading out the manuscript before him, "I guess I had better read it to you. You don't like my writing, and I 've been over it so often I almost know the story by heart. It is called 'The Passing of our Little Brother the Lark.' I got part of that title from an old 'Life of St. Francis of Assisi' that I found on one of papa's shelves — you know St. Francis just loved birds and all the animals. But the story I made up myself; it 's *very* simple, so you must n't expect much." Then he began to read.

It was, as he had said, a very simple incident, told in the simplest manner possible, but I was sorry when he finished. It was a *dear* little story, one of those that linger with you like the memory of sweet music, — it stayed in my head for days, and the more I thought it over the better I liked it. "Why, Jack, I think it 's *lovely !*" I cried eagerly, when he had read the last word and looked up at me for an opinion; "I am positive some paper will be glad to get that."

Jack was pleased, but he looked dubious. "You said that about the other story," he remarked, "and it's still here; though I think it is the better of the two." Because there was fighting and all sorts of wild adventures in it!

"Well, anyway we'll try this one," I decided. "We will begin with a Boston paper this time, and we'll get the manuscript off right away. I have postage stamps. I have a conviction this won't come back."

A little more urging, then the "Lark" was done up and ready for mailing.

"That's off our minds," I said cheerfully. "Now bury this poor rejected 'Mowgli-ish' story, then you can settle down comfortably to your books again. See, I have put an epitaph on the envelope, so you can always know at a glance what unfortunate lies within it: 'Died of that fell disease, Non-appreciation.'"

But Jack did not smile; instead he hastily tore off the envelope and crumpled it in his hand. "All the same, I think it's the best story of the lot," he declared sturdily. "I like the Lark — *I* like 'em all — but I *know* that this one is the best." Then he bundled the manuscripts together, lashed them around with the clothes-line, and put them carefully away again under the sofa. "Whew! I'll have to just pitch in and study like everything," he declared, with an anxious glance at the clock, as he returned to the table. "Well, I will finish up here, then I'll go out and post the Lark. Now, Betty, don't say another word to me."

But he was doomed to disappointment; even as he spoke Judge burst into the room. "Betty, Nannie says to tell you Mrs. Erveng's downstairs, — to come right down 'n' see her," he announced, almost at the top of his lungs. "Oh, goodness, here's one of 'em! Yes, come right up, please; Betty is here," as he suddenly discovered that Hilliard was entering the school-room almost directly behind him.

The Ervengs are to stay in the city until after Nora's

wedding, then Mrs. Erveng intends taking Alice somewhere for a change, — Alice does n't want to go one bit, but of course she must. They have been here a number of times since that night of the ball, but except once or twice for a few minutes I have managed to escape meeting them. Though I think Mrs. Erveng may like me better than she used to, I know very well that she is n't carried away with admiration of me, any more than I am of her. And I had n't forgotten the look Hilliard gave me the night of the ball. I will say, though, that he has been exceedingly polite, — in fact, really attentive, the few times we have met since. But what had he come upstairs for?

"Bother! That ends *my* studying," muttered Jack, in a savage undertone; and snatching up his books, he started for the door, passing Hilliard with a curt nod.

"What 'll I tell Nannie?" demanded Judge, loudly, hanging on to the door-knob and swinging himself from side to side. But with a swift, unexpected movement Jack caught him round the body with one arm and swept him out into the hall. "Stop making that racket, or I 'll rush you straight down to Miss Marston," he threatened.

"You look like it!" saucily answered Judge, — I could imagine his impudent expression. Then the school-room door shut with a bang, and I heard scuffling and laughter.

I would like to have gone to Jack's assistance, for I knew Judge was more than a match for him, — Judge is as strong as a little ox and as supple as an eel, and Jack is neither. But there stood that tall, sleepy-looking young man waiting to be entertained.

"The boys are not at home yet," I said; I am afraid my tone was brusque. "They rarely get in before five o'clock."

"Yes, I know that," answered Hilliard. "I came up in the hope of seeing you alone. I want to talk to you about something."

Talk to me alone! I was so surprised that I stared at

him without a word. He is the *oddest* fellow! This was the first good look I had had at him for over three years, and I found he had n't changed much. He is as sallow as ever, and the freckles are all there; but still — well, I think he has a nice face — not good-looking, you know, but *nice*. His eyes — when they open wide enough for anybody to see them — are a good colour, and clear and honest, and his hair is really a very pretty reddish brown, curling in big, wide waves close round his forehead.

"May n't I sit down?" he asked presently, lifting his eyes suddenly and catching me looking at him — in my confusion I had forgotten to be polite. He quietly drew a chair to the table; and I took a seat on the broad arm of our old rocker to show him I expected the interview to be short. What could he have to say to me? Could it possibly be about my behaviour at the ball? Would he dare to take me to task? My heart gave a few horrid little jumps, and my impulse was to walk out of the room — I am so thankful I did n't! Then I got provoked, and began rocking to and fro very indifferently, beating my foot impatiently on the floor. I am afraid my face was n't very pleasant, for he said, with a deprecating tone in his voice that made me ashamed, "I will not detain you long; and I ask — I beg for your honest opinion —" He hesitated. Then it came to me that he was nervous, and immediately I became quite cool and calm. "As you know, I have been travelling about with my mother ever since I left college," he said presently, in that deliberate, formal way he has. "But now my father wishes me to take up something, — some business, I mean."

"Well," I said, as he paused, "you have had a good long holiday."

He glanced up at me, then went on without taking any other notice of my remark. That was so like the Hilliard of old times that I could barely keep from laughing. "My

father and I are not agreed as to what I should do," he resumed, his eyes fixed on the table. "He would like me to enter the publishing business with him, — *my* wish has been to secure a professorship in a college. I feel that I have no aptitude for business, — in fact," his eyes met mine for a brief instant, "I detest it — but my father thinks by application I can overcome that. We have had several conversations on the subject. I know the wish to have me in the firm lies very near his heart, and I agreed to give him a final decision on my return to Boston. There seemed to be no opening for me in any college, and I had almost concluded to accept my father's proposition, when to-day I received a letter offering me what I most desire, — a professorship in Lowestoft College."

Hilliard looked up; his eyes were bright, his firm, set lips relaxed in a smile which lighted up his face pleasantly.

"Well," I said again, "and what are you going to do? Which position will you take?"

The light died out of his face; his eyes took on a troubled expression. "I ask you to help me settle that," he said. "I am afraid to trust to my own judgment." He paused, then continued slowly: "My father has been more than kind and considerate to me all my life; this is the only return he asks of me, — to enter this business with him, and by and by perpetuate his name in it. It is my duty to do it. But there is that constant dull routine which I so much dislike. I have no aptitude for business, my heart would never be in it. In the other position I should be at my best, — I should grow — expand. I should live my life, — not a mere, bare existence. Which shall it be, — my duty to my father or my duty to myself — to the best that is in me? Decide for me, Betty, I beg of you."

He spoke very quietly, but his eyes were full of trouble, and the hand lying on the table before him was clinched so tightly that the veins stood out like cords.

"Oh, but *I* should not decide such a serious question," I exclaimed. "Why should you ask *me?*" I saw at once — I knew — what he ought to do, and yet I felt as if I could not tell him, for, with an intuition that had come suddenly, I understood what this meant to him.

"I have considered the subject until I can no longer depend on my own judgment." There was earnest entreaty in his voice. "My mother would advise only what she knew I wished. I do not want to ask my father to decide, — that would be unfair. But you, Betty — Some day," his quiet voice shook, and bending forward he extended his hands toward me across the table, "I hope to be able to explain why your decision is more to me than — " He broke off abruptly. "You are brave and honest, you would never flinch from the performance of what you knew to be right. You will look at this question from the best standpoint, you will advise — and expect me to do aright. And I shall abide by your decision. Betty, do this for me."

My lips began to quiver, such a flood of pity came over me for him that my heart ached! "Oh, Hilliard, I am *so* sorry!" I managed to get out, then two great tears came slipping down my cheeks.

His eyes opened wide; I saw his face grow pale. "You mean — my duty to my father?" he asked, though it was really in the tone of one making a statement.

I nodded.

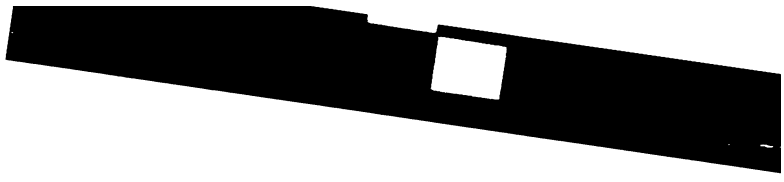
He sat with his head bent, gazing down at the table, the same dull, miserable look on his face that had been there the day of the thunderstorm at Endicott Beach.

I could stand it no longer. I stole to his side and laid my hand on his shoulder in a longing to comfort him. "Hilliard," I whispered, "don't let me settle such a serious question, — your whole future, perhaps. Go to your father — tell him everything — he loves you too well — "

"Ah," he said, turning to me, "that is what I cannot,



"'A junior partnership, sirs, nothing less.'"



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shall not do. He would decide for me, putting himself aside. I must decide for him, and put myself aside. He is growing older, — I am his only child, and he wants me with him. You are right, — quite right; I knew what I should do, but I would not admit it to myself. I should — I will — be to him — all that he wishes. I thank you, Betty — more than I can express." He pushed back his chair and rose to his feet, and, taking my hand between his two, held it pressed against his breast, — I could feel the rapid throbbing of his heart, and that set mine to beating fast. For one moment we stood there looking into each other's eyes; then a shy, frightened feeling came over me, and, pulling my hand from his clasp, I ran back to my place on the arm of the big rocker.

The next instant Phil came bounding up the attic stairs and into the school-room, whistling, "My love is like a red, red rose." "Hullo! old chap, glad to see you!" he exclaimed, tossing his hat on the head of Fee's plaster Juno. "Fee 'll be up presently, — we came home together. What d' you think, friends and fellow-citizens?" he broke into an excited laugh; "I 'm going to Chicago! to open a branch house for our firm! Do you know what that means?" He stuck his hands in his pockets and beamed on us. "A junior partnership, sirs, — nothing less! Congratulations are in order. Of course I sha'n't go until after the wedding, — perhaps not till August, – but it 's settled that I *am* going."

XIII.

THE FIRST BREAK.

TOLD BY BETTY.

A WEDDING is certainly a very exciting event in a family; at least we found it so in ours.

Of course, when Nora announced her engagement we knew that a wedding would follow, but we preferred to think it would not be soon. Sometimes she would say, "When I am married I will do" this or that, — whatever it might be, — or talk largely about "taking my place in society as a married woman," but no one paid much attention to these remarks. Nora is apt to be lofty, and on principle we don't encourage it. It was rather a shock, therefore, when she informed us one day that she and Chad had settled upon the twenty-eighth of the month — April — as their wedding-day, and that papa approved of it. Kathie wept, and some other members of the family — I was one — felt not at all kindly-disposed toward Chad.

But, as Fee very sensibly reminded us, it was Nora's own choice to marry Chad, and if she were suited and happy what more could we ask for her? That she was, after her own fashion, both suited and happy, was very evident; so, with a few grumbles to relieve our feelings, we accepted the inevitable, if not gracefully, at least with a show of resignation.

Well, after that came one excitement close upon the heels of another; nor were they all pleasant. In the first place, Nora had set her heart on having the wedding what she calls "a quiet (perforce) but elegant function," which turned out

to be the church elaborately dressed with palms and other green plants, music, singing, — in fact, all that constitutes a "fashionable" wedding. She declared that this was "due to Chad's position"! Fee and I could n't help looking at each other when she said this; I know he was thinking, as I was, of what that "position" would have been had not Chad's father, as Chad himself expressed it to Nora, "struck a bonanza." It is greatly to our credit, I think, that neither of us said a word, nor even smiled.

Besides all this, Nora wished to have a reception at the house, and a collation to which "only the immediate relatives and friends on both sides" should be invited, — the number, however, grew and grew until it was quite formidable. And if we had all talked until we were hoarse, no one could have persuaded her to give up her plan and be married in a simple way. She knew the limits of the family income as well as any of us, but, all the same, she intended to have her own way if she possibly could.

"I think papa *might* do it," she remarked in an injured tone, when Nannie said something about the cost of all she wanted. "This is the last expense I shall be to him."

Whether she presented that view of the case to papa I don't know, but he made a great effort, and allowed a larger sum for her expenses than he had intended or could well afford. Felix and Phil, too, made her a present of money; and still Nora declared that she had not enough.

She was making herself and the whole family very miserable over it, for we hated to see her so unhappy and not be able to do anything to mend matters, when relief came from an unexpected quarter. Good old aunt Lindsay sent her a generous check, which she informed Nora, in the kind little note that enclosed it, was to help buy her *trousseau*.

Nora was delighted. "Help!" she exclaimed gaily. "I should say it would! I know how to get up very swell-looking gowns at a moderate cost, — this will allow for

several, and lots of pretty things besides. Now I can devote all that papa and the boys have given me to the other expenses. So the difficulties are over. Dear aunt Lindsay! I never dreamed that she thought so much of me. I shall write her the *sweetest* letter of thanks that my brain can conjure up. You can't think, girls," to Nannie and me, — Alice was not present, — "what a relief this money is to me! Now, if things have to be simple there can also at least be some elegance, some style. I hated to have Chad's friends think he was marrying a girl that was poverty-stricken."

"But the ceremony at the church should be enough," Nan said gently. "You need not invite so many to the house. It will necessitate a great deal of labour and expense, and we would so much more enjoy having you to ourselves at the last."

"And as for the 'poverty-stricken' part, — it is no disgrace to be poor," I put in indignantly. "Money is n't *every*body's standard of worth, thank goodness! And if you had but one gown to your back, Mr. Chad Whitcombe should think himself mighty fortunate to get you. As for his friends — "

"Oh! yes, that is all very well as far as you people are concerned," interrupted Nora, with a superior smile; "you don't care what Chad's friends think or say; but I do. I am to live among them for the rest of my life, and I want to begin their acquaintance under the most favourable circumstances. I want them to understand that I know what the proper thing is, and can do it. Don't you see that having had a nice, elegant wedding will invest me with a certain *prestige* among them? Why, I would do with fewer gowns — for Chad will give me as many as I choose by and by — rather than have things skimped or leave out anybody. Oh, I suppose," with a toss of her head, "you all think that I am very worldly; well, I can't help it if you do. *Dear* aunt

Lindsay!" clasping the check rapturously between her hands. "Be sure you send her several boxes of wedding-cake, Nannie; and one of these days, I *must* write and ask her to pay me a visit." Nora's patronising tone sounded very funny.

"If you could only make the old lady understand what a tremendous honour you were doing her, why, I 'm sure that she, and Sanders, the poodle, the cats, and the parrot would all come posting on at once — by telegraph," remarked Phil; and of course we laughed, but Nora refused to see any joke.

Then preparations for the great event began in earnest, and for the next few weeks we lived in a perfect whirl.

Nora is certainly a most capable person; there is scarcely a thing in a practical way that she can't do, and do well. Though glad to have Nannie's advice and help, she took the lead and decided everything herself, from the dressing of the church to the ordering of the wedding-breakfast. There were dressmakers in the house and out, and Nora "shopped" indefatigably. She selected and planned gowns for herself and her bridesmaids, designed hats, and trimmed many of them herself, chose neckties and gloves for papa and the boys, interviewed florists, entertained callers, addressed wedding-cards, wrote notes of thanks, and besides all this went about the city with Chad, giving her opinion in regard to the furniture, hangings, carpets, china, and other quantity of stuff he was buying for the house uptown, where they are to live when the wedding-trip is over. I don't see how she ever stood such a strain.

We were all more than willing to share the burden with her, but that she did n't care for. She seemed to have an idea that no one could attend to anything quite as well as she could herself; so, after swallowing any number of hard snubs, we let her alone to manage her affairs. She settled every question, went everywhere, did everything herself, and

with all — to quote Alan — was "just as cross as two sticks." Such a toil and trouble for an hour or two, and a lot of people that were perfect strangers, and did n't care a rap for her!

We felt sorry for what Phil called Nora's "mistaken zeal;" but it was as much as we could do to put up with her sharpness and domineering ways, — everybody came in for a share, even Alice. More than once there would have been a fuss in the family had n't Nannie always stood by Nora. "Can't you see she is tired out and nervous? *Do* be patient with her!" she urged. "Everybody has a way of doing things, — this is Nonie's; how do we know until we have tried that any of us could do better? Remember, she is going away; we shall have her with us only a little longer; do let us all be kind and loving as possible, so she can always have pleasant recollections of her last days at home."

"H'm! wish she 'd think of *our* recollections," drawled Judge; he spoke feelingly, — Nora had just given him a blowing-up. "She 's been on a regular war-path to-day, — every single one of us has caught it." Then, as Nora appeared in the doorway, even as he spoke, he rolled his eyes from one to the other of us in the most comical manner, and, picking up a pencil and note-book from the table, added solemnly: "The great Indian war-chief, Thunder Cloud, having arrived, we will now go over the battle-field together, and count the killed and wounded." Some of us giggled, and as Nora had on her "haughtay" air, to avoid any more words, Phil laid sudden hands on Paul and rushed him off the scene, though he was himself on a broad grin.

This disagreeable state of affairs lasted for days, until Phil declared that he was "on the ragged edge of despair," and we were all almost as nervous and irritable as Nora herself; then, one fine morning, down she came to breakfast as smiling and good-natured as anybody could desire. Nora is like the famous little girl with the curl: "when she is nice, she is

very, *very* nice," and for the three or four days that were left her at home, she was so sweet and gentle, in fact so perfectly lovely, that our feelings underwent a great change. We could n't do enough for her, even going to the extent of being polite, almost friendly, to our prospective brother-in-law.

Then we really had some fun. Max was to be best man, and, except for one friend whom he proposed for usher, Chad let Nora arrange all other details to suit herself. We expected that she would feel in duty bound to bring in some of Chad's wonderful "friends," but she did n't; so the wedding-party was made up of near relatives and old friends.

The bridesmaids were Helen Vassah, Hope Unsworth, Nannie, Alice, Kathie, and I. Knowing how Nora felt about the "three Misses Rose," I offered to give up my place to some one else if she preferred, but she would n't let me do it, declaring that she "could stand it for this occasion." And Mädel was the maid of honour, —



"The sweetest little maid of honour!"

the sweetest little maid of honour you ever saw! Then the ushers were Chad's friend, Phil, Hilliard, Murray Unsworth, Judge, and Alan.

Nora had at first entertained the absurd idea of inducing the two younger boys to attend the wedding dressed as pages, and walk just behind her in the procession up the aisle. They are handsome little chaps and would, she said, "lend a picturesque effect to the proceedings." She coaxed, entreated, commanded, offered bribes, but to no avail; they flatly refused to be what Alan calls "any old-fool pages." And Judge waxed highly indignant. "'Pages'! a-a-ch! What d' you take us for, — kiddies? I just guess *not!*" Then he hinted darkly of accidents that might occur in a most public and inopportune manner. So, knowing that he is not above a practical joke, Nora gave up the attempt to utilise them as "picturesque property," and consoled herself with the next best thing — which we all thought infinitely better — of having little Marguerite Van Buren and Scaramouche Richmond as ribbon girls. Sweetly pretty did they look too.

The younger boys were even disposed to look with suspicion on Nora's wish that they should be ushers, until they saw how interested the men were who were to be their companions; then they became very much elated.

On account of his lameness, Felix preferred to take no public part in the proceedings, and Jack asked to be left out, so as to be with Fee.

The whole party, bride and groom, best man, bridesmaids and ushers, met at our house for several evenings, before the twenty-eighth, to talk over things, to hear what was happening, to see (that is, the girls) the gowns and pretty clothes and presents as they came in, and to practise the order in which they were to walk up the aisle.

Chad would have liked a "church rehearsal," but when Nora mentioned it papa vetoed that. "No," he said, look-

ing with disapproval at her through his glasses, "an occasion such as this is too sacred and solemn to be travestied by any 'rehearsal' of the kind you suggest. I prefer that you do not have it." And that settled the matter.

Everybody was good-natured and in high spirits, so those meetings were very jolly. But when the day before the wedding came, and Nora began dividing among us such of her Lares and Penates as she did not intend taking to her new home, our spirits dropped to zero, and we grew very dismal. It came forcibly to us then that she was actually going away. The squabbles and disagreeablenesses were all forgotten; we could only remember how much we loved her and would miss her.

She had the whole family — except papa — come up in her room that last evening, and there she presented each one with a keepsake, chosen from among her home treasures. There was something for everybody. Her silver-topped cut-glass inkstand was for papa; for Phil and Felix a picture each, painted by herself, — Nonie is quite artistic; her pet Russia-leather travelling-clock for Nannie; the hammock that had hung across her room, and a Japanese cushion belonging to it, for me; Lady Jane and the rest of her plants fell to Mädel, who loves plants and helped Nora take care of them, Mädel also got her Japanese-lady pin-cushion; to Jack her copy of Shakespeare, and to Judge and Alan the Indian moccasins, bow and arrows and miniature canoe that had hung on the walls of her room; and all the rest of her things to Kathie, who was her room-mate and pet. Alice was not forgotten, nor Miss Marston, and there was something for nurse and each of the servants.

Simple gifts were they, not to be compared with those that had been coming so plentifully to the house during the last few days, but of great value to us. In every family, I suppose, there is one member whose belongings are looked upon as being more desirable than those of the others; with us

Nora was that member, and we knew she shared this opinion with us. So when we saw her, as Judge plaintively remarked, "despoiling herself" for our sakes in this liberal manner, our hearts were stirred with gratitude. And the graceful little speech which accompanied each keepsake was hardly spoken when tears began to flow and handkerchiefs came into requisition. Kathie opened the "bawl" — Judge is responsible for the spelling of that last word — and in less than five minutes everybody was either sniffling or openly wiping their eyes.

That is, everybody but Nora, who sat looking pensive and very pretty, but without a tear; and presently this aroused Phil's ire and nearly caused a family jar.

"Of course I am very sorry to leave you all; but I 'm not going far," she said practically, when Phil called her "a stony-hearted, adamantine young female!" "so what is the sense of my weeping and wailing and making myself a fright for to-morrow?"

"Oh, very well, if that 's the way you feel about it; then we are big idiots to waste any feeling on you, that 's all," cried Phil, huffily, — his handkerchief had been one of those that flourished; and he had embraced Nora and kissed her tenderly. But now he set his picture down hard on the table, and jammed the unoffending handkerchief back in his pocket with quite a fierce air.

"I am sure I never asked you to 'waste' any of your affection on me. You are very rude!" retorted the bride-elect, with decided warmth.

"Oh, Phil, *please* don't say anything more — you will just spoil this last evening," implored Nannie. "Suppose we go downstairs. I heard the bell ring, — perhaps Murray and the girls have come."

"If other people don't mind spoiling the evening, why should I?" answered Phil; he is very fond of Nora, and I think he felt hurt.

But here the two younger boys created a diversion. Warlike sounds had been coming from the corner where they had retired to examine their mementoes, but in the other fuss these had passed unnoticed. Now, however, the two came to the front with a rush, each in possession of one moccasin. "There 're three presents 'n' two people, — how 're we going to divide 'em?" demanded Alan, in an excited voice that at once commanded attention. "One moc'sin is n't any good, an' Judge *won't* give me the other."

"*I* ought to have 'em both, for they just fit me," declared Judge. He wore the pretty beaded slipper drawn over his shoe, and cast longing looks at the one in Alan's hand, who immediately put it behind his back. "Unless," suggested Judge, with a sidelong glance at Nora, half impudent, half persuasive, "you want to give me that Chinese coin-sword on the wall? Kathie 'd never want that; then Alan can have this," motioning to the ornament on his foot.

"You *are* the cheekiest little beggar!" exclaimed Felix; while Phil made a dash for Paul, which that young person cleverly dodged, hopping about on one leg.

"You might as well do it," advised Nannie, "or there will be a never-ending feud over those moccasins."

"Oh, yes, give it — for peace," chimed in Kathie; she is n't a bit selfish.

"Will you get it down from the wall for me, Phil?" asked Nora, very sweetly.

So peace was restored. Judge got the Chinese sword, and Alan the moccasins, and when we trooped down to the drawing-room, a few minutes later, Phil and Nora went arm in arm.

But Nora was practical to the last. The wedding-day was as clear and beautiful as heart could wish, radiant with April sunshine; the trees and shrubs in the two little parks near us were in full spring leafage, the dogwood white with blossoms, and the tulips and hyacinths round the fountains gave out

colour and fragrance. I was so full of happiness that morning that I sang aloud for joy; and I wondered, as I had all along, at Nora's cool composure.

She came down with the rest of us to the early breakfast, which was a hurried affair, for the "function" was to be at high noon, and there was a great deal to be accomplished before then.

"Now, girls, I want to tell you something," Nora said, as we all rose from the table to go upstairs. "*Please* remember that I would rather not have any weeping to-day. You know I am not going to Siberia or Kamchatka, or any other outlandish place, where we should never see one another again. I shall be — after we get back from our trip — right here in the city, where you can all come to me; and I shall often run down home for a visit. I am marrying Chad because I wish to, because I choose to; so altogether there is no cause for tears, and I should prefer that no one shed them. I wish you would promise — I *do* want everything to go off well; and it really is n't good form to cry and act as if Chad were tearing me away from you all against everybody's will."

Alice laughed. "I promise I sha'n't shed one tear, you most practical of brides!" she exclaimed.

"Don't be alarmed —" I began; I was *so* provoked at such cold-bloodedness!

But Nan slipped her hand in my arm, and pressed it, to silence me. "You are the one whose wishes are to be considered to-day, Nora," she said. "I am sure we will all do as you wish."

Well, that *was* a busy morning! Nora arranged the flowers in the drawing-room, gave minute directions in regard to the wedding-breakfast, and attended to a hundred and one things about the house before she went upstairs to dress. Nannie, Miss Marston, and I had our hands full too. There were the younger boys to dress and get out of the way;

they were so wild with excitement that Nannie had Phil take them in charge, so they should n't get into mischief. Kathie and Mädel came next, and they were almost as bad; but at last *they* were ready, and despatched to the drawing-room, under orders to "sit quietly on two chairs and not touch anything." Then there were refractory neckties to tie for Phil and Felix and Jack; then Nan ran down to see after papa; while I helped Miss Marston put on a new gown which she declared had all the hooks and eyes in the most unget-at-able places. And when Nannie and I were in the midst of our own dressing, there was a call from Nora, for Alice, Nan, and me to come help her get into the bridal gown and veil. It seemed as if we would never be ready; but after all we were, and in good season too.

"Now, had n't you better go down and see papa, before we all gather in the drawing-room for the start?" asked Nan, when Nora was dressed. She looked perfectly *lovely* in all that white, with her gray eyes shining like stars, and the beautiful colour coming and going in her cheeks. She was like a beautiful picture, — I could have stood and gazed at her for hours; but she did n't act as if at all conscious of her beauty.

"You think I had better go in the study and see papa alone?" she asked reluctantly.

"Why, certainly." Nan's eyes opened a little in surprise. "He expects you."

"Well," Nora said; and down the four of us went together.

Alice went into the drawing-room, and Nannie and I expected to leave Nora at the study door, but she kept us. "Oh, don't leave me!" she said, in a hurried whisper, catching at Nan's hand. "Come in, both of you, — *do!*" So we went in.

Papa was standing by the table, looking very thoughtful, and so spruce that I hardly knew him, — he actually had a flower in his button-hole!

If Nora was nervous, she did n't show it. "Here I am, papa," she said, going gracefully forward, with her hand out, and smiling up at him.

Papa took the offered hand, and held it, looking down at her with that troubled expression that comes in his face when he does n't quite know what to do. "My dear," he said presently, a deprecating tone in his voice that was touching, "this is a day when you should have — your mother. I am but a poor substitute for her." Then, as if with an impulse, he reached out his other hand and laid it gently on Nora's head. "God's blessing be with you throughout your married life, my child, and may you ever serve and glorify Him," he said solemnly. "May you be to your husband and children what — your mother was — *is*" — his eyes turned to the patch of blue sky visible through the open window — "to me — and to you all. May your influence be like unto hers."

We stood in silence for a minute, then Nora lifted her face to be kissed. "Thank you, papa," she said sweetly.

A quick rap at the door and Phil put his head inside. "Nonie, we are ready — waiting for you," he said. "Will you come, sir? And you, too, girls. By starting now, we 'll just reach the church on time."

Nora had impressed upon us, "Now, girls, be sure you notice everything, so you can tell me all about it afterward." But from the minute description which, later on, she gave us of the whole proceedings, it was evident that her usual keen powers of observation were not affected by the novelty of the situation. In fact, she saw a great deal more than did all of her bridesmaids put together. As for me — I remember Hilliard's helping me out of the carriage, his being beside me in the vestibule of the church, and calling my attention to the exquisite green of the trees in the park; the scarlet and yellow and white around the fountain. Then the church

doors opened to admit the bridal party, I saw a sea of faces, — all eyes turned upon us, — and I have no more idea of how I got up the aisle and to my proper place with the others than if I had not been there.

My scattered wits came back to me during the service; and though, of course, I had been to weddings before, I doubt if I had ever realised in the least, until then, all that this wonderful, holy, and solemn compact of marriage stands for. It came to me with a strange, new force what a marvellous, beautiful, compelling power was that of love! To leave home, kith and kin, loved associations, and companionship, and go forth with the chosen one, willingly, gladly, to the other end of the world if need be; to share dark as well as fair days, — trial and sorrow as well as happiness and joy; to be patient and forbearing, to cherish and be faithful and tender — under the influence of this wonderful Love. For how long? A week, a month, a short while? "Till death do us part." Nay, the affection which this covenant stood for went beyond that, throughout eternity, for "love never dies." That was the kind of love that had been — *was* — between papa and mamma. Was it like that with Nora and Chad? I wondered if they — if any of those who stood with me were moved, as I was, by that service. Then, raising my eyes, I met Hilliard's earnest gaze fixed on me, and there was something — I could n't explain what — in the expression of his face that made me know, without a word being spoken, that his thoughts were like mine.

Hilliard and I are such good friends since that afternoon in the school-room. He talks much more freely to me than he used to, and somehow I understand him better; I am finding out that for all his sleepy look and slow, deliberate manner, he is really a very clever fellow — Felix has always said so, and now I see that he is right. He knows about ten times as much as I do, or ever shall; yet he tells me all about the things he is interested in, and acts as if my opin-

ions were of importance to him. And I know he is too sincere to feign a regard he did not feel

Though we are so perfectly different in disposition, I have found — now that we are getting to know each other — that Hilliard and I have ever so many tastes in common; and I have the new, pleasant feeling with him that no matter what I do or say, or what any one else may think, *he* will not misunderstand me. I never dreamed it could be so nice to have a friend; and a pleased, happy feeling came over me that day in the church, to know that we were thinking the same thoughts at the same moment.

The reception proved a success; there was n't a hitch anywhere, and so far from shedding tears all appeared to be in the best of spirits and enjoying themselves immensely. Chad's languishing eyes beamed; and he twirled his golden mustache with so unmistakable an air of satisfaction that Phil declared it was an insult to the family. "I suppose he thought we 'd make a fizzle of the affair," he exclaimed, in a half-laughing manner. "Guess we know a thing or two, if we *don't* own a silver mine."

"He certainly looks happy; and one may forgive a man a good deal on his wedding-day, — particularly when you know the sort of a person he is," remarked Fee.

"Yes, and the beautiful bride he has just won," chimed in Alice; "he should look as proud as a king."

He *was* proud of Nora, any one could see that by the glances which, regardless of "good form," he kept turning on her as she stood beside him receiving his friends and her own. She looked beautiful, and her manners were perfectly charming, — in society Nora always seems to know just the right thing to do and say.

She was delighted with the reception; every now and then she would say in a quick aside to Nannie or Alice or me, whichever was near her: "Everything is going off *beau*tifully — is n't it? Now, is n't it worth all the trouble?" or "How

picturesque those palms and flowers make the old rooms! They took an endless time to arrange, but the effect more than pays for my pains;" or — this was at the last — "I am so tired, I am ready to drop, but I don't mind — I feel so proud of the result of all my work. I know you people must feel so too."

We did n't, not any of us; but we had n't the heart to spoil her pleasure by saying so. "Where is Nannie?" she asked, when the time drew near for her to leave home. "Find her, Betty; and you girls can all come up and help me get into my travelling-gown. Why, I saw Nannie here only a few minutes ago."

I had seen her, too, but she was not to be found in the drawing-room. I knew she was not upstairs, and the only other room on that floor where she might possibly be was the study. Still I hardly expected to find her there; so, knowing that papa was in the front room talking to Mr. Van Buren, I opened the study door and walked in without even the preliminary of knocking.

But, as it turned out, Nannie *was* there, and standing before her, holding her hands and looking earnestly into her downcast face, was Max. "— how about me, dear heart?" he was saying, in a gentle, pleading voice. "Have *I* no claim on you to be considered?"

"But you see how things are —" began Nannie, looking up appealingly at him.

Had n't I been in such a hurry, it seems as if I *must* have noticed that there was something unusual in Nannie's face, in Max's manner, in that term of endearment; but as it was, I did not until — Well, I knew they had always been close friends — and Nora was waiting. I broke into the conversation without any hesitation — afterward though, I recalled Nannie's startled expression, and the swift, bright colour that flooded her face — "It 's time for Nora to leave, Nan; she is going upstairs now to change her gown, and she wants

you — we are all to help her. Come right away, won't you?" With that I rushed back to the bride, leaving Nannie to follow.

We all kept up bravely until it came to the last good-bye, then tears began to flow and refused to be checked. Kathie, Alan, and Mädel wept audibly, while Judge, who had his pockets full of rice, sat in the niche at the head of the steps and kicked his heels, sniffling loudly. Papa looked unhappy and blew his nose several times, walking up and down the room, — we were all up in Nora's room; and there was a suspicious moisture in the eyes of the three older boys, — I think Phil felt very badly. Nora was the most composed of us all; she kept making merry remarks to cheer us up, until she came to Nan, whom she bade good-bye last of all. Then, of a sudden, her lips began to quiver. "Oh, Nan, *don't* love me less when I am away from you!" she cried out sharply.

"As if I could — my own dear sister!" exclaimed Nannie. Their arms went round each other, and for one instant, regardless of her hair and the new travelling-hat, Nora's head went down on Nan's shoulder.

Then she straightened up, dashed the tears off her cheeks, and, with a brave attempt at a smile, went swiftly down the stairs, followed by a heavy shower of rice from Judge and Alan, who had revived enough to throw a handful with pretty good aim.

Remembering Nora's injunction of the morning, I had controlled my feelings with a firm hand; but when I saw her break down — I knew what that meant from her — the tears sprang to my eyes; my heart swelled with a warm rush of love for her. Oh, should trouble come to her! Should Chad ever dare be unkind — impose on her! I forgot how equal Nonie is to taking her own part, and flew out in the hall just in time to catch my new brother-in-law at the head of the steps, as he prepared to follow his bride.

"Now, Chad, be good to her — d' you understand? You be *very* good to her or — we will — we will every one of us *hate* you!" I exclaimed. I had clutched his arm, and, as I spoke, in my excitement I shook the frail, dandified little creature.

Chad hastily drew himself away with the queerest expression on his face, — it occurred to me afterward that perhaps he thought I had suddenly become demented. "Your remarks — aw — are highly unnecessary," he declared grandiloquently. Then he started after Nora.

Everybody crowded into the hall with merry chatter and laughter as the bride and groom passed out, under a shower of slippers and rice; in a minute more the carriage-door banged, and they were off. The wedding was over, and Nora was gone.

XIV.

FACE TO FACE.

TOLD BY ALICE.

AS far back as I can remember, a large family has always attracted and fascinated me. I suppose this is because of my being an only child and possessed of but one cousin, who, though a boy (Hilliard), and a great favourite of mine, was always very much quieter, more sober, than I ever was myself. I liked to have Hill visit us, but I never depended on him for any liveliness.

The larger the family the stronger was my admiration and my desire to know them intimately, entirely regardless of what station in life they might fill. One of my early ambitions was to "go and stay" with the O'Tooles, who occupied a tumble-down shanty on the outskirts of the town where we lived. O'Toole *mère* "took in" washing; winter and summer she might be seen, bare-armed and bare-headed, hanging out an endless quantity of wet garments; and periodically O'Toole *père* assisted in removing our ashes. He was usually accompanied by three or four small O'Tooles, who on these occasions hung over our back fence and smiled at me in such an engaging fashion that I would have rushed into a violent friendship with them on the spot, had I been allowed to do so. To get to a favourite drive of my father's, we had to go by the O'Tooles' cottage, and the brief moments of passing were eagerly watched for, and proved of unfailing interest to me.

There were seven children in the family, and by sight I knew them well, from the twelve-year-old "Meery" Ann,

who " mothered " all the others, to Timmie, the bow-legged baby, that stood, thumb in mouth, staring at us. In appearance they were as like as so many peas in a pod; and as far as being continually in evidence goes, they were certainly public characters, for they were always out of doors, in groups of from two to seven, sitting on the sagging gate-posts, — gate there was none, — sprawling in the dust, or tumbling about the road in company with a disreputable-looking yellow dog and a long-bearded, solemn-faced billy-goat. Dirty, ragged, barefoot, and red-headed, but as jolly a little crew as you could find anywhere, with a merry insouciance shining out of their sunburnt, freckled faces that was fascinating to me. I used to long most fervently to join in their game of what they called " Ring er Rosie," and would crane my neck out of the carriage for a last glimpse of Biddy and Pat seated back to back in the starch-box wagon, their feet dragging in the dust, blissful content in their faces, and drawn by the billy-goat, whose gait was, to say the least, spasmodic. Through the O'Tooles I first came to know that there were differences in station which, even in our land of equality, might not be overlooked.

My next experience of a large family came several years later by the way of four sisters who were at the same boarding-school with me for a winter. The Kennistons were merry, vivacious girls, who insisted on occupying one large room together, and who, though they quarrelled incessantly, were never happy apart. They were fond of " chaffing," as they called it, and were very frank in pointing out each other's faults to each other; but woe to the outsider who, deceived by this, should undertake to attempt a like familiarity! Family feuds would immediately be buried, forces combined, and the offender properly punished. They had four brothers who occasionally came to see them, — generally the four at one time, — and then the eight would be sure to go off together somewhere for a treat in the best of spirits and

good-nature. I dare say they quarrelled — half a dozen times, perhaps — before they got back; but all the same I feel sure that they enjoyed themselves immensely in one another's society. The girls always said they did, and to hear them talk one might have supposed that each brother possessed, at least, all the cardinal virtues. Any trouble or sorrow, any prosperity or joy was shared by all, belonged to all. There was with them the same good fellowship, the same *oneness*, which had so attracted me — poor, lonely only child! — to the little ragamuffin O'Tooles, and which I find so conspicuous in this dear, delightful Rose family with whom I have been living for the last six months.

From the time that Hilliard first wrote me of the Roses, — of that funny episode when Phil and Betty went over to uncle Erveng's to sell him the Fetich, — I was interested and wild to know them. I was delighted, therefore, at the excuse to stay with aunt Abby while Betty was visiting her at Endicott Beach, and it goes without saying that we became fast friends.

I found Betty just the sort of girl Hill had described her in his letters, — quick-tempered, impulsive, and brusque, sometimes downright blunt, but fearless, honest as the sun, and true to the core. Like the rest of us humans, she has her faults, but lack of warm-heartedness and loyalty can never be counted among them.

While we sat on the sands together that summer, I used to coax Betty to tell me about the nine brothers and sisters at home, and with that and what I could get out of Hilliard I thought I had a pretty accurate idea of the characters of the other members of the family before I came to live here. Several of these estimates of mine *were* correct, but others — well, looking back on that first meeting in the school-room, it is curious how wraithlike, dim, and shadowy certain of my impressions were compared with the warm,

flesh-and-blood reality that I know after six months' close companionship. Experiences have come to me in these months quite unlike any others in my life, — not all of them joyous, in fact some of them the saddest I have ever known, yet I would not be without one of them; not for anything would I be willing to forget them, and go back to the Alice Endicott of those other days — but I long for my dear mother sometimes!

I still retain two of the impressions I received that first afternoon: one was of Nora's striking beauty; the other of the noble, delicate face of Felix.

He was the first one I saw as I entered the room, and I knew at once that he was "Fee," before I noticed the crutch, half concealed beside him. He was leaning against the piano, and my brief first glance just caught the annoyed expression of his face, the frown between his eyes. These, when I spoke to him a few minutes later, had been replaced by an air of bored indifference which might have made me very uncomfortable had I not understood exactly the cause of it all.

There was a babel of voices in the school-room as Mr. Rose and I went up the attic stairs, — singing, then laughter and chatter, — and above all as we approached the door came distinctly, in a man's voice, some disjointed sentences. "Oh, bother Alice!" was the first, delivered with an impatient force which immediately secured my attention. "Nothing but Alice, Alice, from morning until night . . . ten days . . . and I'm about tired of it!" came next; then we were in the room; and the moment I laid eyes on him I knew it was Felix who had spoken.

Now, while I am not at all what is called a "touchy" person, neither am I one of those that belong to what Betty designates as "the door-mat order" of people, — those who like to be walked over. But on my way down I had been disturbed by doubts as to whether I should not have

remained at the station "until called for." And now the knowledge of my unexpected, unannounced arrival; the quickly uttered remonstrance of the two older girls, which I heard distinctly; their expression of — in Nora's case annoyed — distress, and the general air of startled surprise among them all made but one course possible or desirous.

I had come upon them unawares, unintentionally I had overheard what was not intended for me, and, as I reminded myself, "listeners never hear any good of themselves"! Besides this, there was something in the helplessness of the offender, in the clever, sensitive face, even in the quick hiding of the crutch and the brave attempt to stand carelessly by the piano, that appealed strongly to me. Almost as if it were a new possession, there came to me a realisation of the sheer delight of active motion, the blessedness of my own perfect health, and with it a swift intuition of what this heavy affliction, this ever-present "thorn in the flesh," must mean to one of Felix's temperament. I remembered how much he had accomplished in spite of it, of all I had heard from Betty and Hilliard of his genius, his patience in that long, trying illness, his cheerfulness and courage all through his life; and any offence that I might have taken was lost in a feeling of admiration for his character and of deep — not pity, but compassion.

With the full forgiveness I then accorded I gained a strange, new sense of perfect sympathy with him, of understanding, which has never left me.

I saw that the mere supposition of my having heard Felix's remarks was making them and him most uncomfortable, and I determined that by no look or word of mine should they ever know that I had. And this I have stuck to, though I have been highly amused and once or twice nearly cornered by Nora and Phil in their guarded but persistent attempts to find out. After a while, though, they

must have become convinced that I had not heard, for they dropped the subject.

But it was not easy to reassure Felix. If I could only have said frankly to him: "I know you think I heard you call me a bother, and imply that my coming here to live was a nuisance. Well, you are right, — I did. But I am not angry. I hold no malice whatever; in fact, I am willing, really anxious, to forget the whole thing and be friends, if you only will." This is what I should like to have said, and, had the case been reversed, to have had him say to me. I like frankness, but I felt instinctively that with one of his disposition such a course would not mend, but make matters worse. He would be intensely annoyed and mortified, humiliated in his own estimation, and firmly believe that he was in mine. So when he quietly ignored me, or treated me with the extreme politeness that keeps one at a distance, all I could do was to try to appear perfectly unconscious of any difference in his manner to me from that of the rest of the family, and to act as pleasant and friendly to him as to the others.

I kept this up as long as I could, but it was new to me to be snubbed, — people are generally so kind, — and one day I suddenly made up my mind to speak to Felix and settle the question whether I should remain with the Roses until mamma and papa came home, or go out to California to aunt Abby.

Well, we had such a *nice* talk that day, just standing in the hall, and it ended in a compact of friendship which made everything very different.

The next few weeks were very pleasant, — at least they were for me, — and in them I learned to know Felix well. He is so clever and quick-witted and bright, and there is a subtle charm of manner about him which, when he chooses to exert it, makes him a delightful companion. I used to wonder at the statement of the Roses that "Fee was the life

of the house," and at their anxiety to have as much of his company as possible. But in those weeks I grew to understand it. The cold formality that had chilled me was a thing of the past; he now treated me with the same natural, merry *camaraderie* that he gave to his sisters, only that now and then — or so it seemed to me — there came into his manner to me a certain something that I shall not attempt to describe, which he did not give to the girls, and which I grew to look for and prize.

Those were jolly times; there was always something happening, — there always is in the Rose family. Hill says that is one of the delightful points about a large family. Seeing the boys off to business in the morning and welcoming them back in the afternoon were daily events of interest. Then there were the gathering of "the clan" in the school-room before dinner, when everybody was generally in a good humour, the ready laughter and amusing nonsense, the impromptu dances in the drawing-room, the informal games in the school-room, ending with the suppers cooked over the grate fire and which always tasted so delicious. I enjoyed it all immensely, and wrote mamma that I had at last achieved my great ambition, — for in the Roses I found the jolly good fellowship of the O'Tooles and the vivacity and clannishness of the Kennistons, combined with an originality that never allowed one to tire of them.

Besides these gay times there were others which I enjoyed still more, — little unexpected talks with Felix in the halls or on the stairs, and cosey times in the school-room when he read aloud to one of the girls and me, or, best of all, if we were alone, when he gave me his confidence and talked to me of his ambitions, his hopes and fears for the future. And it was a great happiness to me to notice, as I did, that he appeared to seek my good opinion, and would follow suggestions I might make. Phil has done that, too; but then it is entirely different with Felix!

Then came the day of the lawsuit — Felix's first law case — and that dreadful night of the fire! It was at me he looked when he got up to deliver his defence that day in court; and I answered him bravely with my eyes, though when it was over and he came to receive his deserved congratulations I could find no words to express them. But I think he understood that this was not from want of interest, — at least I had that feeling. That evening was one of the jolliest we have had, until in a second — how it happened I have no idea — my sleeve was on fire!

That *awful* night! I have but two distinct recollections of it, — Felix's white face, the look in his eyes as he came toward me with wild, uncertain steps; then the touch of his hand on my shoulder, the tone of his voice as he called "Alice! *Alice!*" That told me what he has never — may never — put into words. But I know it — I am thankful for that, I always shall be. Sometimes, when my heart is heavy, I shut my eyes, and listen to that voice as it rings in my ears. No matter where I am — in the quiet of the night, or in the crowded street, or in the drawing-room in his very presence — I can always hear it, and it is of great comfort to me.

All other incidents of that night are blotted out of my memory, lost in the excruciating throbbing, the agonising pain which crowded everything else out of my thoughts and took away my courage. I was told that it was Phil who put out the flames and saved me from an awful death; so I thanked him as well as I could.

After that I spent several weeks in my room, and when I came downstairs again it was to find Felix completely changed toward me. Though it was the very first time we had seen each other since the fire, he met me as coolly and indifferently as if we were utter strangers. And that behaviour he has kept up ever since. He is not at all rude, — in fact, he is quite as polite as in the old first days of our acquaintance; but then I knew the cause of it, and now I do

not. Then we had just met, now we were friends, — at least I was still his friend. Of his friendship I began to have grave doubts, for it soon became evident to me that in a quiet way, so as not to attract attention, he was trying to avoid me as much as possible.

At first I was surprised and deeply hurt, even while feeling that an explanation would follow. But when none came, I grew both hurt and angry at such undeserved treatment. I had almost made up my mind that it was my duty to require what had not been offered, when some remarks which Nora made in my room the evening her engagement was announced decided me not to do so. If an opportunity occurred to speak to Felix I would, — I thought our friendship gave me that right, — but I decided not to seek an interview. I could not believe myself in fault — and yet, why had he said that to Nora and Phil and Nannie? Did he expect them to come back and tell me of it? Had he thought it necessary? The angry blood would fly to my face at the bare idea; and then I ignored Felix, and laughed merrily, and sung about the house, and talked to Phil, who is the best-natured, kindly creature possible, and who since the accident seems to think he must look after and take especial care of me.

There were other times, though, when I got the absurd notion that Felix was unhappy. He grew thinner, he was certainly less merry, and he was seldom with the family of an afternoon or evening, pleading "business" as a reason for absenting himself. But beyond a few quiet, polite words, or a hurried glance which once in a while I caught before it was averted, he gave me no attention, so I had really nothing to go on to support this idea of mine.

The rest of the family were as good and kind as ever, and Betty was the dearest comfort to me. But, oh! how I longed for my mother! I did not write her of what was troubling me, for fear of adding to her care while papa's health was

so delicate; but I tried, for her sake, to be brave, and womanly, and sensible, and above all cheerful. I think that sometimes it requires a great deal of courage to be cheerful.

Between his business engagements, and so much going on — the gay doings in honour of Mr. Warwick, Mrs. Blackwood's ball, Nora's engagement, and then the wedding — the estrangement between Felix and myself passed unnoticed; at least no one alluded to it.

The Ervings came on to New York for Nora's wedding; and now aunt Abby has made me promise to go to the Berkshires with her for an indefinite visit. I do not care very much about it, — I should prefer going to the Cottage with the Roses. But aunty declares I am not looking well, — as if one could with the arm that I have had! — and when she threatened to write to mamma about it, I gave way at once. So in a week or two more I shall go away with her.



"Kathie is devoted to fancy work."

I had quite given up the idea of speaking to Felix before I went, — for days at a time we scarcely saw each other, — when one day we came face to face in the most unexpected manner, and had our talk.

Nannie and Betty were out that afternoon, only Kathie and I were in the school-room. She rocked slowly to and fro, working on a piece of her beloved fancy work, — Kathie is devoted to fancy work, — and I sat on the old chintz-covered sofa, thinking hard and very much perplexed over something which had lately come to my knowledge.

Some one opened the school-room door and walked in, but I did not look up until I heard Felix's voice. "Kathie," he said, "there are two small girls downstairs, asking for Mädel and you — "

"Oh, yes — I know — Kitty and Clare," cried Kathie, hurriedly starting up, and beginning very rapidly to fold up her work. She is a neat little maid, and would not think of tossing her work on a chair or table, as my warm-hearted, hasty Betty would be apt to do. In a minute it was put away, and the door closed gently behind her.

Felix came toward me. "Is that you, twinnie?" he asked, peering forward in his near-sighted way; then he paused, and with his hand on the back of a chair stood looking gravely down at me.

"Felix," I said with a sudden resolution, "will you sit down here for a few minutes? I would like to speak to you about something." It was a wonder to me that my voice could be so steady with a heart beating at such a rate as mine was.

He came round and took the chair I had indicated, saying with quiet politeness, as he did so, "I shall be very glad to listen to anything you may say," but he did not look at me.

Then I told him what was on my mind. It was about his favourite sister, his twin, — Nannie, — and I could see that he was deeply moved.

"Poor little Nan! Brave, self-sacrificing little Nan! I never thought of this!" he said, when I finished. "She has done this for our sakes — that is why she said nothing to

me — I am afraid we have been very selfish." He sat with his hand over his eyes for a few minutes, before he asked: "Would it be possible? Could any of the others take her place?" adding, with a touch of despair in his voice, "I feel like saying 'After Nannie — the deluge.' No one could be like her to us, — she has been mother, sister, everything. What would my father do? And yet she should be considered. Tell me if you see any way out of the difficulty." He looked imploringly at me.

I could see that he was upset by my tidings, and putting my own feelings aside I unfolded what seemed to me to be a reasonable plan, and we talked it over (you shall hear about it later). It was a long talk, for though expressing his great desire to make Nannie happy, Felix was loath to accept my proposition. Over and over it we went, until each of his objections had been discussed and disposed of.

"You are right, — I see you are," he exclaimed at length, "and I am a selfish beast, — professing to have Nan's happiness at heart, and in reality shrinking from the thought of giving her up. Please do as you suggest, — it seems the only way out. But," with a faint smile, "I can't help fearing that we shall all fly to pieces under the new *régime*." He rose and held out his hand to me. "You are so good to take all this thought and trouble for us," he said gratefully.

As he spoke his eyes met mine, and before I realised what I was saying the words had passed my lips. "Felix, what has come between us? May I not know?"

He dropped my hand hastily, and I saw the colour spring into his face and settle in two bright spots on his cheeks.

"Are we not still friends?" I asked, my heart sinking as I noticed how quickly he averted his eyes, and the firm line his lips took. "Or is our compact at an end, that you act so differently? Surely, under the circumstances I may ask that."

Felix stood supporting himself by the back of the chair beside him, and without lifting his eyes he said slowly, — almost coldly, it seemed to me, — "I am your friend, Alice — I shall always be — to the end of my life. Your true, sincere friend, — believe that."

"Then why this coldness, — why ignore me as you are doing?" I exclaimed; rising impetuously, I went toward him, with my hands extended. "Oh, friend, is this kind?" I asked, my voice quivering with emotion.

Then he lifted his eyes to mine; and the sadness I saw there went to the depths of my heart. "Yes," he said quietly, "it is kinder than you think. It is the kindness of a true friend."

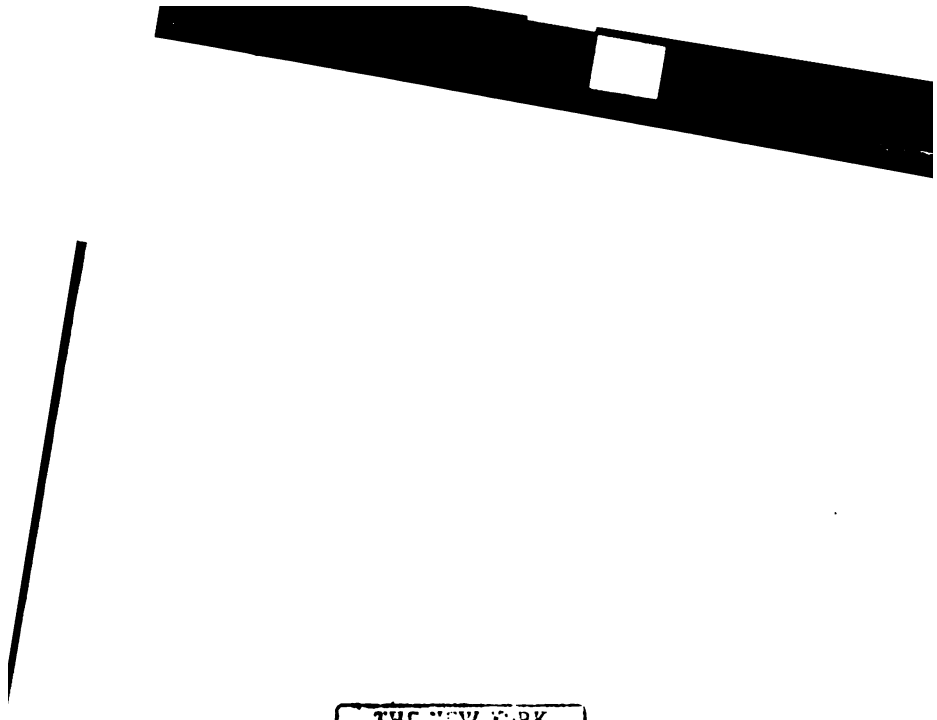
"But why — how — oh, explain to me!" I pleaded. "I am not an unreasonable person; tell me why this estrangement must be between us. I will abide by whatever lines you lay down; only tell me why you do it. Oh, let me share this with you!"

His face lighted up, and what flashed into his eyes sent comfort to my heart; it is now treasured in my memory with that cry of "Alice! *Alice!*" But it was hidden in a moment by his downcast lids. "Alice, my friend," he said very gently, — there was a little thrill in his voice which presently died out, — "trust me that it is better our relations to each other should continue as they are now, and ask no further questions. Believe me when I *assure* you," he looked straight at me, "that I am your firm, stanch friend; I shall be to my death — and after that — who can tell? Trust me that I am doing what is — best — wisest for — us both."

With eager, anxious eyes I studied his downcast face. Nora's words came to my mind, — poor Felix! Oh, if I might be perfectly frank with him! It seems to me that so much sorrow and unhappiness might be averted if people would but be perfectly, honestly, frank with each other; or if not averted, at least borne with more resignation and courage.



"Felix stood supporting himself by the back of the chair."



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"Felix," I whispered tremblingly; my heart was beating wildly at my own temerity. "Felix — is this because of your — your poor health — because you think — "

But he turned swiftly on me. "Alice! *Trust* me!" he cried out sharply. "Ask no questions; only believe that I am your friend, only your friend, *always* your friend."

For one brief instant our eyes met; then he walked the length of the room, catching at the furniture in a blind sort of fashion as he went, though he had his cane, and passed out of the door.

I moved back to the sofa and sat down; my head was in a whirl, my heart like lead. But I was not sorry we had had our talk.

"Trust him! — my 'true friend,' 'always my friend,' '*only* my friend!'" I heard myself repeating aloud. Then my head went down in the sofa cushion, and the unspoken cry went up from my soul, "O Lord! Lord! give me strength, give me courage!"

XV.

FROM AN OUTSIDE POINT OF VIEW.

TOLD BY ALICE.

A FEW years ago we spent a winter in Algeria, and among the acquaintances we made there was a dignified old Arab. He kept a bazaar, — a close, dark hole of a place, — where were to be found silks, amber, golden embroideries, carved boxes, and rare curios that simply could not be resisted. Not the least interesting of these curios was the master of the shop, — Ibu Abdullah el-Bessâm. His features were clear-cut as an intaglio, and his complexion the exact shade of papa's brownest, most carefully seasoned, meerschaum. Add to this flowing robes and an ample turban, — which, in point of cleanliness, were not above suspicion, — soft, dark eyes, and a tortuous pipe that rarely left his lips, and you will have an idea of our picturesque Arab. But no words of mine could describe the gracious manner with which he always welcomed us to his shop. Papa declared that our American dollars had a good deal to do with this, but mamma and I preferred to think it was a matter of mutual attractiveness. Ibu was more talkative than his people usually are, and it got to be a part of our day's programme to drop in and, while sipping the tiny, delicious cup of coffee fragrant with pastille of ambergris, which he offered to a chosen few, to listen to the wise sayings that fell, proverb fashion, from his lips.

Mamma said at the time, "Remember these proverbs, Alice; there is a truth like a grain of gold in each." So I wrote them down; and now one of them has suddenly come

to my recollection, and is going through and through my mind persistently. Put into brief English, it is this, "If you eat of a man's salt, be lenient to his fault." The grain of gold in this proverb is, I think, so obvious that it need not be pointed out; I must only keep its significance well in mind while I tell you of the Roses as they appear to me from an outside point of view.

This description of the family, however, has one exception, which I consider myself at liberty to make.

It is, of course, proper to begin with Mr. Rose, and I preface my remarks about him by stating that I am sincerely fond of him, in spite of his many peculiarities and general air of being up in the clouds. He is not like my dear, affectionate father; but is he responsible for that? I often feel as if he should be pitied rather than blamed for being so reserved and undemonstrative, and for having that shy, cold manner which repels people. One would surely neither choose nor cultivate such a nature. This coldness of manner, though, has never been shown to me; from the first Mr. Rose has been extremely kind and — for him — cordial to me. He talks to me generally on the subject nearest his heart, — his work, — and he allows me to chatter to him of anything that may come into my head. I feel no constraint with him, and I think, perhaps, that is one of the reasons that he likes me. I have wondered if he would not be less formal with his children were they all to act freer, more unconstrainedly with him, as do Felix and Nannie, who, I notice, are his favourites. But of course I may be mistaken; they should know him better than I.

It is a continual problem to me, and to some others, too, I fancy, that such a father should have children frank, natural, warm-hearted, and merry as these are. I think he admires them, — he certainly is proud of Felix, — but I imagine he is always unpleasantly in doubt as to what they may do next, and how he should properly meet the emergency. For, let

him once believe that his duty toward them lies in a certain course of action, and nothing would induce him to swerve from it, no matter what the cost to himself, — witness the finishing of the Fetich! And that sense of duty -- the responsibility of it — runs through the family, for all their fun and frolic. They may grumble and fret over a duty beforehand, but they never shirk it when it actually comes. And this when for years they have had no mother!

Mr. Rose is a bookman in the strictest sense of the word; he lives almost entirely in a world of his own, in which, I fancy, only his wife was ever allowed. From what I hear, she must have been wise and gentle as Nannie is, and bright and merry as Betty. Her husband was devoted to her; the love between them must have been very beautiful. I can understand that her warm, frankly expressed affection gave him heart and joy, that her bright spirits and sympathy and appreciation buoyed up his courage, and, as well, kept him in touch with the outside world, — his own kind. He refused to see the end approaching, and I am told that her death came to him as a terrible blow, which he would not share with any one, shutting himself into his study, and fighting out his battle of grief alone.

After that he withdrew into himself more than ever; and his one great interest now is in his books. But the memory of her lightest word is still, and always will be, a law to him. My idea is that he feels more strongly than any one realises what she was to her children, and what he is not, and tries in his way to rise to occasions. To me it was really touching to see Mr. Rose the day of Nora's wedding, wandering through the crowded drawing-room, among the guests, determined to do his duty by them as a host, but wretchedly uncomfortable and out of place, and showing his feelings unmistakably in his face.

So he walked up the church aisle with an erect dignity that did credit to the beautiful daughter on his arm. But, as the

service progressed, his shoulders drooped, and he fell into his usual position, — head bent, hands clasped behind his back. We knew his thoughts were far away, and, from the sad expression of his face, Nannie thinks that his memory had gone back to the day when he and his beloved "Margaret" stood before the altar as Chad and Nora then stood.

Nannie had to touch him quietly, to remind him when the time came for him to give Nora away.

I am always provoked when I hear people say that Mr. Rose is too much of a bookworm to have ever had any strong affections. I believe it is as Nannie says: "Mamma was to him the one great, beautiful reality of Love. To her he gave all that he had to give, — his whole heart. And she still has it, ever will have it. He cares for us not because we are his children, but hers. And if he could love but one, it is right that she should be that one, — dearest mother!"

In the matter of reserve and coldness Phil is certainly most unlike the *pater*, as he and Felix call Mr. Rose. He is a big, handsome fellow, frank and light-hearted, a great tease, not at all intellectual, but bright enough to see a joke very quickly and to be very good company. Impetuous, outspoken, and honest, quick-tempered, and a little rough and masterful sometimes, but kind and upright; the sort of man that makes mistakes, and owns to them bravely; that makes friends wherever he goes; the sort of man that men like, and that women instinctively trust, — this is Philip Rose.

Phil and I have been good friends for a long time, and, besides saving my life that awful night, he has been so unremittingly kind since, so considerate and thoughtful, that I feel toward him now as if he were in reality the dear big brother I have so often pined for. He brings me flowers, and is devoted to me in such a frank, open fashion that no one could possibly — I least of all — mistake the nature of his feelings for me. And yet I have fancied, now and then, that a certain little brown-eyed girl, who comes frequently

to the house, is not quite pleased at Phil's attentions to me. Foolish little Helen! While I give Phil full credit for all the good qualities he possesses, he is the last person I could ever have more than a sisterly affection for. And, without being disagreeable, I think I have made this plain to him. Like the rest of the family, — you see I count myself a member of it, — I am delighted with Phil's business success, though I know I shall miss him dreadfully when he goes to Chicago.

The person whom I did expect might feel jealous of Phil's brotherliness to me was Nora, for he is regarded in the family as her especial property, in the same way that Felix is of Nannie. But, instead of objecting, she did all in her power to strengthen our friendship. She sounded his praises to me until I grew very tired of the subject. Nora is one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen; and she is practical to a degree that is not found in any of the other Roses. They were all surprised, in fact, disgusted, at her being able to care for Chad Whitcombe; the way they received the announcement of her engagement was too funny to be expressed. Dear, simple-hearted Roses! That he has a large fortune was not of the slightest importance to them, and their opinion then and now is that Nora has made a poor marriage, — one that does her no credit. But from my point of view the match seems what might have been expected of Nora, and I know she is perfectly satisfied. The Roses remember Chad's share in that trouble which came upon them some years ago, and it is hard to make them credit that he has changed. But he really has, — his love for Nora may have accomplished it, — and a more proper devotee to conventionality than he is now it would be hard to find. In their way I am sure that he and Nora are devoted to each other, but it is a way that does not appeal to the rest of the family. Just now Nora's head is full of Society — she would like me to spell it with a capital, I am sure — and her "Position" in it. But the training she has had must count for something, and by-and-

by I fancy there will be a reaction, and then will show the true Nora. This is how it appears to me; and, though we have never talked of it, — the Roses would not talk one another over with even me, — I think that Nannie feels about this as I do.

Nora can be severe and a little domineering sometimes; excepting Kathie, the younger children did not turn to and obey her as they do Nannie, — yet I have known her to go to the greatest trouble in making clothes for them; and in preparing for guests, or entertaining them, she would willingly relieve Nannie of a large share of the labour.

Such a lonely household as this was after the wedding! Everybody has written to her, — Mrs. Chadwick Whitcombe, — and the return of the couple or a visit to the Cottage from them is eagerly discussed. And it says a good deal for Nora that she has found time to send home two long letters, giving a full description of the gaiety she is enjoying, and the attentions that are being showered upon her.

These letters have been read and enjoyed by all; but, though only one was addressed to her, they are considered Kathie's property, because she was Nora's room-mate and pet, and are regarded as treasures by her. Kathie is a demure little maid, as polite and graceful in her manners as Nora, and with a quiet helpfulness that is all her own. It is understood in the family that Kathie's feelings are easily hurt, — even to tears, — so allowance is always made for that; and now and then Miss Marston complains that the little girl's obstinacy is the cause of a disturbance in the school-room. Nurse, however, sniffs incredulously at such times, and declares with emphasis that "a nicer child could n't be found nowhere." Nurse is not handsome, but she is certainly a character.

It is very amusing to see Kathie putting on the little airs and graces of Nora, and to notice how closely Mädel imitates *her*. Such is the force of example!

Mädel is a dear child! and it is great fun to see her "mothering" Alan, as far as that sturdy youngster will allow it; while her twin, Paul, seems to turn to Kathie for companionship, which she is only too pleased to give. For if any member of the family is spoiled it is Judge. He is a bright, precocious, pert boy with a ready tongue, and the faculty of making smart speeches, that sometimes hurt. He has the reputation of being very clever; well, perhaps he is; but to my mind he is not half so clever as my favourite Jack. I am not fond of Judge; in fact, I often get very much provoked with him for the fun he is continually making of Jack.



"Nurse is not handsome, but she is certainly a character."

The Roses make a great mistake in their estimate of Jack. Because study is a drudgery to him and mathematics a stumbling-block, they set him down as a dunce, and no one ever made a greater mistake than that. Instead of a dunce, Jack Rose is much nearer to a genius, as they will all discover some day, or I am very much mistaken. Those stories of his which I have read show a beauty of imagination that astonishes me in a lad of his age. If he will only go on writing, as I have urged him to, and send out some of his work, I feel sure that its worth will be recognised before long. And as for influence, Jack's influence reaches further than that of any other person in this

family, though perhaps he, as well as they, would be surprised to hear this.

With Jack's rare simplicity of character and gentleness, there is a truthfulness, a clear perception of the right, and a firm adherence to it, which insure the finest kind of influence. His perfect unconsciousness of these qualities in himself adds to this. He has faults, of course, — which of us has not? — but he is the only person I have ever met who fulfils my idea of Galahad as Tennyson portrays him. I am afraid the Roses think I am rather silly on this point, but that I cannot help. To them, this brother of theirs "is a nice, peaceable old chap, but — well, rather dull, not to be compared with Judge." To me, this blindness is astonishing.

I know that Felix is very fond of Jack, but I doubt if even he appreciates my Galahad at his proper worth. I don't think he knows anything of Jack's writings; only by accident did I learn it, and I was then bound to the strictest secrecy. I believe that he is ashamed to have the brothers and sisters know that he writes. He is afraid of Phil's teasing, of Judge's tongue. I think that even Betty, who is usually his confidante and chum, knows nothing of this. By and by, if Jack will allow me, I intend showing uncle Erveng some of his stories. Who knows what may come of it?

When aunt Abby asked, almost the first question the day of her arrival, "What do you think of the Roses?" I answered promptly, "I think they are a delightful and most original family!" adding, as I saw her indulgent smile: "You know my weakness for numbers, but really, aunty, quite apart from that, they are charming people. Mamma says there is no test so severe as that of close intimacy with the person or persons that one admires. But the Roses can stand that test. I like them better, I find them more attractive and interesting to-day, than I did when I first came among them."

I felt that she was looking keenly at me. "Well," she said presently, "I am glad you have found them pleasant, as it was by my advice that your parents placed you with them. Yes, they are a nice family. I have always thought that Nannie and Nora have sweet manners. At one time Betty was pert, and dreadfully brusque; but she seems to have somewhat improved."

"She is the dearest, best girl in the world!" I exclaimed warmly. "Betty is perfectly honest and sincere."

"That may all be," aunt Abby answered drily. "But it does not follow that she should be hoidenish and pert as well."

"But she is n't hoidenish now, aunty," I urged. "Betty's manners are *very* nice; a great many people admire her more than they do Nannie, sweet as she is, or even Nora. She is so pretty and so natural, and bright and amusing. She is getting a great deal of attention in society; really, she is a charming girl."

But aunt Abby was not to be convinced. "You need not call so many adjectives into requisition, Alice," she remarked very coolly. "I am quite capable of appreciating the young lady's *many*" — that was in sarcasm — "excellent qualities without them. As I said before, she has improved, but I certainly do not consider her a *rara avis*. Your liking for them makes you overestimate some of the Roses." And I knew there was no use in saying any more.

I think aunt Abby must like Betty, — she invited her to Endicott Beach, and has had her come with me to lunch and dine at the hotel several times since arriving in New York, — but she certainly criticises her very severely. Sometimes I wonder if this is n't because she knows that of all the Rose girls Hilliard admires Betty the most. Hill is the apple of his mother's eye, and we — her relatives — all know that where he is concerned aunt Abby is inclined to be jealous. She wants Hill to be happy, but she resents that

happiness should come to him from any one but herself. And it goes without saying that she thinks there is no one in the world quite good enough for him; he has not such an idea, though. If anything, he goes to the other extreme, dear old fellow!

Knowing them both as well as I do, I can see that the acquaintance — it is now a friendship — between Betty and Hilliard has been of benefit to both. Her courage and influence helped him to throw off the nervousness which had clung to him for years; and I know that only lately her brave spirit has braced him up to undertake a long-deferred duty. On his side, though she has never admitted it by words, I am sure that Hill's calm, equable disposition has done Betty good.

My dear, splendid, warm-hearted Betty! I knew that an unexpected and most trying demand was to be made on her, and, while I hoped she would be equal to it, my heart ached for her. What was required would, I knew, be very irksome to her, very hard. It was possible she might refuse. But I felt it was right, indeed only fair to Nannie, that Betty should have this opportunity offered her to make two unselfish people happy.

Ever since the death of Mrs. Rose, Nannie — then a mere girl — has "mothered" the whole family, her father included, and has done it faithfully and well. The same beautiful mother-spirit that made little "Meery" Ann O'Toole the willing slave of her sturdy, happy-go-lucky crew of brothers and sisters, and gave her strength to lug about the bow-legged, lumpish baby, is what animates Nannie Rose. I wonder sometimes if being the eldest girl in a large family develops the qualities of unselfishness and patience and tact? Nannie certainly possesses all three in an unusual degree. I have been "sitting at her feet" all this winter, and I have learned more than one lesson. One burden after another had been assumed by her, or been put upon her, and so quietly;

apparently so easily, were they borne that no one gave it a thought, not even her twin, who loves her dearly. The happiness which is dearest to a woman, which is a woman's kingdom, had been put steadily away from her, without one murmur that might be heard. Now it was in Betty's power to change all this; but would she? Nannie had spared them all these years; in fact, she had been too good, too kind, taking upon her own shoulders what should have been divided between the three older girls.

This was the perplexity I had laid before Felix during our talk in the school-room that afternoon I have told you of. I intended to speak to Betty very soon after that, but it required a day or two to get back to my usual self. I felt that what Felix had said was final. I did not see the necessity which governed him; but the limit of our friendship was clearly set, and what fell to me now was to bear myself as bravely as I could. To no one but my dear mother could I ever speak of what had been my hope, my expectation; and she was far away. I could not endure that any of those around me — fond as I was of them — should guess, should pity. So, though my heart was heavy, and life seemed poor and bare, I tried to be sensible and brave and cheerful. And I found I could only do this by interesting myself in others, and firmly and deliberately putting any thought of "what might have been" out of my mind. Some wise man, I think it is Charles Kingsley, says that if you want to make yourself thoroughly unhappy and dissatisfied, just think over the things that you *might* have, which are denied you, the attentions you should receive, — the happiness, joy, etc., that you feel should be yours, but is not, — in fact, reverse "My duty to my neighbour" into "My neighbour's duty to me," and the result will be intense unhappiness in about — I think he allows five minutes!

I try to keep this well in mind, and not to give myself time to think of anything but what concerns others' happi-



"'Alice *Endicott!*' she exclaimed breathlessly."



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ness, and — well, if my courage fails sometimes in the "night season," only God and I know of it.

Betty came very readily into my room and took a chair near me. "'Please your majesty, mum,' I 'm ready to hear this important matter," she said, drawing down the corners of her merry mouth and trying to look very sober. "I am all ears; in the words of the immortal Swiveller — was n't it Swiveller? — to the Marchioness, 'Fire away!'" She threw a roguish glance at me.

"I want to tell you something about Nannie and Max," I began.

Betty opened her eyes a little. "An interesting subject," she declared. "Proceed!" with a gracious wave of her hand.

"A few days ago I came upon Max in a most depressed mood," I continued, "and he gave me his confidence. Betty, do you know that Nannie and Max have been engaged for more than two years?" The effect of these words was electrical. With an eager face, out of which the mirth had died, Betty bent quickly over the arm of her chair.

"Alice *Endicott!*" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"They were engaged before Max went to Australia," I said, answering the questions in her eyes. "He wanted her to marry him then, to go with him. But she put him off. Since his return he has urged again and again that she would fulfil her engagement, and be his wife; each time she has put him off. Do you know why?"

"Ah, ah! that was what he meant that day of Nora's wedding — in the study!" exclaimed Betty, bringing her hands together with an air of conviction. "I 've never thought of it until now. That is just what it was. But Max, Alice — *Max!* It does seem too odd; why, he is nearly as old as papa. Well! Of all people! But Max is nice," her face lighted up with a pleased smile; "he is *splendid!* In fact," — Betty never takes long to arrive at a decision, —

"come to think of it, he is *just* the one that should have our blessed, darling old Nan!"

"Then you are willing they should be married?" I asked quickly. "It all depends upon you, Betty." I saw her startled face, but I went quickly on: "Nannie has put Max off from time to time because she thought there was no one to take her place in the family; and she was too faithful, too noble and self-sacrificing, to consider her happiness before her duty to you all. For this reason she has kept her engagement a secret from all her dear ones. And when Max protested and urged, as he had a right to do, that he too had a claim on her, she offered to let him go rather than 'desert' — so she calls it — those whom her dying mother had left in her charge. But it is n't fair that Nan's happiness should be sacrificed, Betty; it is not even necessary, for there is some one, who, if she chooses, could assume Nan's place, Nan's duties, and leave her free to marry Max. I know how dearly you love her, Betty; you are several years older than Nannie was when she took the charge of the household on her shoulders. *You* could do it; you could take Nan's place, Betty. Will you?"

She sprang to her feet, her face white, her eyes blazing. "Stop, Alice; stop this *minute!*" she commanded. "You 've taken leave of your senses, I think. *I* to fill Nannie's place! *I — I!* Why, the idea is ridiculous! perfectly *ridiculous!* I *could n't* fill her place if I tried, and I 'm not going to try —"

"But, Betty, I thought you loved Nannie," I interposed. "Think how patient she has been — is now, for she does not dream that I know of her engagement, or am proposing this to you. I thought you would do this for her, and go to her and urge, *plead*, that she should let you take her place. It should be done very delicately, very tenderly, and as if it were no serious undertaking on your part, or she will not

consent. Can't you do as much as this for one who is so dear to you? I know you love her dearly — "

"Don't say *another* word," she blazed out, shaking her hands vehemently at me. "You know all she is, all she does, and expect *me* to take her place? I can't — I won't — I will not, I *will* not!" I have never seen her so excited. "I can't help what you think of me; I don't care! I *will* not!" And turning away abruptly, she rushed from the room.

XVI.

THE CALL OF DUTY.

TOLD BY BETTY.

WHEN I rushed out of Alice's room my one idea was to get to a place where I could be alone for awhile — and think. But *where* in that house was I to find it? There are so many of us that we fill the old home to overflowing, and such a thing as strict privacy is almost unknown. I knew that Kathie and Judge were in the school-room, practising a noisy piano and cymbal "duet"! Since Nora went away, I share her room with Kathie, and Nannie has taken Mädel in with her. But I could n't go there, for Nannie and Miss Marston and nurse were in possession, — with the door open between the rooms, — looking over summer clothes and things that had been packed away through the winter; and I would n't have met Nannie just then for a kingdom! There was Fee's little room, — but he might be home any moment, — and, anyway, for all I knew, Jack was seated right next door; he would see me go in and be sure to come flying out to know what was the matter. Absolutely there was n't a corner where I could go; and yet I felt that I *must* be alone. A desperate feeling came over me; what *should* I do! Then the blessed thought flashed into my mind of our dear old church a few blocks away. It was open every day; and there I would find the quiet and loneliness I craved.

I flew upstairs, snatched up the first of my hats that I could lay hands on, and ran down again, putting it on.

But some one had seen me. "Betty," called Miss Marston, leaning over the banisters, "I wish you would come up here and decide about these —"

"Can't!" I called back — I could n't trust my voice with a longer sentence — and going straight on.

"Betty! did you hear me?" I knew she was displeased, but on I went, — as I felt then, fifty Miss Marstons could n't have stopped me.

I whirled through the front door and almost upset Jack, who was just outside of it. "Goodness me!" he hastily remarked, catching hold of the railing to steady himself. "You nearly knocked me over!" Then, eagerly, in a different tone, "What 's the matter, Betty? Anything wrong? Want me to go with you? I 'll go."

I had gone down a step or two, but now I wheeled round and looked up at him.

"No, you will *not* go!" I declared fiercely, — I could hear my voice trembling. "I am going somewhere where I can be alone for a few minutes, without a parcel of prying people around to see and know everything. *Alone* — do you understand? Don't you *attempt* to follow me! Now rush in and tell everybody you can find!" I was most wretched and unhappy, and I vented the sharp anger in my heart on poor, unoffending Jack.

He stood and looked at me with wide-opened, astonished eyes. "*Well!*" he said in a tone of conviction; "if you have n't a temper!"

But I hurried away, down the avenue and across the park. Mädel was trundling her hoop round the fountain, and she came running to me with a smile. But I waved her back. "I don't want you — go back to your play," I called out sharply; then, when her back was turned, I slipped into the church.

How calm and peaceful it was in there! The glow of the sunshine was gone, and dusky shadows were gathering fast in



"Mädel was trundling her hoop."

the corners and under the galleries. So far as one hurried glance could tell me, no one else was in the building. At last I was alone! I turned hurriedly into a pew where the shadows were thickest, just behind a pillar, and, going down on my knees, buried my face in my hands.

What a blessed relief to be away from curious eyes! Now I could think. But at first my thoughts were in a whirl, — I was only conscious of being *very* unhappy.

Gradually, however, I began to realise what had happened.

Nannie was engaged — engaged to Max! That meant she must marry — *would* marry him some day — and go away from us. Nannie go away! Nannie leave us! Despair filled my heart. How could we *ever* endure it? What would become of us without her! To me and to the younger ones she had taken mamma's place; we turned to her for everything, we depended on her. The mere thought of losing her made me sick with apprehension, and so lonely that a great, choking sob filled my throat. She had seemed so exclusively our property, — to actually *belong* to us. And now Max wanted her, — they were engaged, they would be married, and he would carry her away to his own home. She would no longer be ours. Even if she lived in the city, what would a visit every day in the week — and Max might

think *that* too often — be to having her with us every hour in every day?

Some of Alice's remarks came to my mind; what was it she had said? "Engaged for two years" — "she put Max off" — "noble, self-sacrificing" — that was Nannie. "He had a claim on her" — "urged her, as he had a right to do" — "to marry him" — "to go away with him" — that was Max. And Alice had proposed that I — *I* — should take Nannie's place in the family and let her marry Max!

I — to — take — Nannie's — place!

"Oh, no! *no! no!*" I cried out loudly, starting up on my knees and bringing my clasped hands down on the ledge against which I had been leaning. Then I remembered where I was, and glanced hurriedly around; but there was no one in the church save myself.

I to take Nannie's place! Indeed, I would not. Of all the family I was the very last person to fill such a position; everybody knew that, and I best of all. Alice was crazy to even *think* of such a thing. The idea! What did she or Nannie or any of them expect? — that *I* was to assume the charge of that big household and carry it on, — I, who knew no more about housekeeping and management than Mädel? Well, if they did expect that, they would be most beautifully mistaken, that was all. I should do no such thing — I simply *could n't!* The very thought of all that Nannie was to the family made my heart sink. And as to my undertaking to fill her place, that was preposterous!

To begin with, there was the care she took of papa, — constant, yet so quietly rendered that, while depending greatly on her, he was, as we all knew, hardly aware of it. Could I *ever* get on such familiar terms with papa as to be able to tie his neck-gear without danger of strangling him in my nervousness? Then the hours she spent over his work, — the successor to the Fetich, — writing at his dictation, copying, arranging — of what service would *I* be to him, with no knowledge of

languages save my mother-tongue and a little French? In imagination I saw papa's expression of disgusted annoyance every time I entered the study, then the rescuing of his beloved pages from my vandal fingers, and the air of stern relief with which he would finally request me to leave the room and *not* return. Papa would suffer, so would the successor to the Fetich, and, from my point of view, so would I, most of all.

This was but a part of Nannie's responsibility. What was she not to her twin and dearly loved Felix? Who could comfort and cheer him in his moods of despondency as she, and soothe him into good nature when he was cranky and sarcastic? So with Phil, — she knew just how to subdue him when he got rough and undertook to "order" things generally; and without his getting mad, either. Would either Felix or he allow me to do such things? The very idea was absurd.

Then I thought of how kindly and wise was her rule over the rest of the family, — how she let me take all my woes and difficulties to her, no matter how busy she was, and always helped me to the enduring and solving of them; how considerate she was with Kathie; how tender with Mädel; how she encouraged Jack, and curbed Judge, and coaxed Alan. And it was done so easily, so quietly, that until to-day I had never fully realised all that she did for us, all that she was to us. Nannie had a way about her that brought out the very best in people, and they would do as she proposed, because her plans were almost always very good. But let me propose anything, and — from past experience I knew — there would be open war; everybody would know better than I, and many times they would be right.

I pictured the ineffectual struggle I should have to make Nurse follow any orders *I* might give, the open scorn with which she would receive them, — why, she talked to me now sometimes and scolded as if I were one of the little ones!

There was a secret but vigilant warfare between Nurse and Miss Marston, each jealous of the other's influence and control over the younger children. Only by exercising the greatest tact could Nannie keep the peace between them. Phil always declared I had no tact, — how in the world, then, could I ever get on with those two? Cook was another trying case, — she has been in the family for years, almost as long as Nurse, and is devoted to us, but she thinks she knows *everything* and is n't fond of taking orders. Nannie has had her trials with Cook, and *she* knows a great deal — almost all there is to know, I guess — about the different vegetables and meats, — steaks and "prime" cuts and all the other horrid, uninteresting items of housekeeping. What would I be against Cook? — I, who could n't tell mutton from beef before it was cooked, nor if the price was ten cents or a dollar a pound! And as for vegetables, carrots, turnips, and parsnips were one and the same to me; pumpkins and squashes had no separate individuality; and marketing was a miserable perplexity and a bore. Cook was fully aware of my woful ignorance; in my mind's eye I saw myself ignominiously routed at our first tilt, — "laid in the dust and walked over," to quote Phil.

How *could* anybody expect me to undertake housekeeping, when I did n't know the first thing about it?

I groaned, and slipping to my knees buried my head in my hands again, and tried to look this great trouble squarely in the face. Above all things I *abhor* housekeeping, — the daily going to market, the constantly needed replenishing, the perpetual thinking of what people should eat. I had so often pitied Nannie when she was struggling after "new dishes" and "a variety," with our limited income, and been deeply thankful that the problem was n't mine. And now I was expected to assume it? I groaned again, and it was a relief to twist my shoulders angrily, as Kathie might have done. I 'm not lazy, I can golf and row and walk

and play tennis equal to anybody; but one can do those things and then be done with them until you choose to take them up again; but housekeeping is a perpetual, never-ending labour. If it was only the custom for people to eat once a month, it would n't be so bad; then one could make a great effort and provide a tremendous feast, knowing there would be a whole month in which to rest before another effort was necessary. But to get through one meal only to rack one's brain over the next and the next and the next —

Looking forward, oh, how dreary the prospect seemed! No fun or pleasure, no happiness, nothing but care and struggle — and a perpetual providing of meals!

Besides, with a shock that turned my heart cold, it suddenly came to me that this responsibility would be — not for a few months, a few years even, but — *for all my life!* Nora was gone, Nannie would go — Kathie and Mädel were little children — papa would need more and more care as he grew older — one of us girls *must* remain at home. If I undertook it, what would this mean for me? With a new insight, I read feelings, hopes in my heart that I had not dreamed were there, and for a few minutes I knelt shivering and shaking. Then a hot rebellion came sweeping over me like a wave, — why should *I* give up the happiness of my life to stay at home and be a drudge? Why should n't *I* be happy, as well as Nora and Nannie? I was a woman now; who could make me stay and assume this dreadful responsibility? I would go home and settle the matter at once, — there was a duty to one's self; and I was not going to be made a slave of.

I half rose; but something seemed to draw me back to my knees, and then there came to me a recollection of the night mamma died. We were all huddled together, frightened and crying, beside her bed; one hand — the other was in papa's clasp as he knelt by her — was stretched out toward us. I could see her white face on the pillow

again; I could hear her dear voice as she said slowly, with little gasps between for breath: "My dear — *dear* children! I leave you in the care of our heavenly — Father — and in the care — of each other — one in the care of the other. Be kind — one to another — tender-hearted — be forbearing — and *loving*. My little — ones! Don't cry — so bitterly — we shall meet — again. In — care — one — of — the — other — *remember*."

I think I had forgotten them in all the years since that night, but now the words rang through and through my ears, as if just spoken. It was a solemn charge, which some of us had tried to keep. Felix and Phil had "cared" for each other; in her fashion, Nora had "cared" for Kathie, and sometimes she had certainly put herself to great trouble in making and having our clothes made, — that was her way of fulfilling her trust. Jack, too, did his share, — we called him lazy, but who was so kind and patient and forgiving as he? And in a large family that counts for much. And Nannie — I remembered all she had done, was doing — I thought of the study she had given up for want of time, of her singing, her beloved violin playing, which had been laid aside "until she was less busy" — a season which never came, — her quiet hour with Fee had dwindled to fifteen or twenty hurried minutes in his room in the afternoon or evening. Looking back, I could see how many things she had given up which would have been sweet to keep, and so quietly, so uncomplainingly that no one had noticed it. Even Max she would have renounced! Ah! *she* had "cared" more than any of us. Brave, patient, loving Nan! Mamma's own child! All her dear love for me and her goodness came to my mind, bringing with it a rush of feeling that made my heart swell. What had *I* ever done? How much had I ever "cared" for the brothers and sisters? I had often been sharp, impatient, commanding, but it seemed as if I could n't think of any kindness I had done,

any service I had rendered that had put me to trouble. This might be my opportunity, — why should Nannie be so heavily weighted, and I exempt? Mamma's charge had been laid on me as much as on her.

"I won't shirk any longer — I *will* try to fill Nannie's place!" I raised my head, and said the words aloud, very slowly and firmly. But, oh! my heart was like lead within me. If this were only something that I could do with a tremendous effort of will, and get it quickly over once for all! I hated it, I despised it, I *dreaded* it!

There was no consolation for me in my resolution; for a while — I don't know how long — I knelt there in dumb despair. I wanted to pray, to implore for strength to carry out *cheerfully* what had to be done, so that Nan might never know what it cost me. But no words would come. God seemed so far away. I could only remember His great majesty and glory. The God of the whole wide universe, — would *He* care that I, poor, selfish, heedless Betty Rose, was in trouble and most unhappy? I had been taught that He was merciful and loving, that He noted even the fall of a sparrow, and that He did not "willingly afflict or grieve the children of men." Oh! why, then, had He sent me this great trial? He must know how *awfully* hard life was going to be for me. He was all-powerful, — why could n't He have let it be that some one else than I should take Nannie's place in our family, — some one who could fill it better, who would feel it less? *I* had had so little pleasure, now I would have none; and *why* should *I* suffer, when, if God chose to have it so, everything could be so different?

Oh, how desolate I felt! So many thousands — millions — of girls in the world were happy as the day was long; why should *I* be weighted down with care and responsibility, and be so unhappy?

I went down into the very depths, and I prayed and *prayed* with all my heart and soul and strength that God would

raise up some one else than me to take Nannie's place. But I felt as if I were far, far away from Him. And then — while I was praying — there came to me a remembrance of what Jack had said one day in the school-room about the trials and temptations of our Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on earth. Jack said that He had suffered and had had to struggle — "as hard as any human being" — to overcome them. And yet He was God's own Son!

Dully my mind pictured Him in the wilderness struggling with those three temptations. What were they? With a sudden wonder it came to me, — did it seem to Him that there was another way to accomplish the great work easier than the one which the Father then showed Him? Was that the temptation? And was that lonely conflict of His the putting away of the world and His own will? Had *He* suffered, — had *He* had to struggle with His own soul before He could say, "Thy will be done"? The thought gave me comfort. Strange thoughts came crowding fast to my mind, — I saw Him weary, discouraged, railed at by His kinsfolk, deserted by His people, rejected by His nation, — I saw Him in Gethsemane that last night, praying in His human agony that if it were the Father's will He might not have to face the awful ordeal of the morrow, — I heard the cry of despair on the cross!

Such humility as I had never felt before in all my life filled my soul then. God's Son! His only-begotten and beloved Son, — and *He* had to face temptation, He had to endure trial and sorrow beyond any in all the world! If He was not exempt, what was I, to expect it? How dared I grumble? Oh! what Jack had said was true. "Being tempted like as we are," *He* would understand, *He* would help me to bear whatever came, — our human Elder Brother, the dear, blessed Son of God!

That sense of nearness to the divine Being which I had felt at Endicott Beach in the midst of the storm came to me

again and lifted me out of myself — up to Him. And with a certainty of being heard, of being answered, I raised my hands and my whole heart to Him. "Oh, Jesus Christ! *dear* Lord Jesus!" I prayed; "*Thou* knowest how hard this is; help me to bear it — *well.*"

If I should live to be an old, old woman, I could never forget that afternoon!

With the very utterance of my prayer came a peace — I think it was the peace of God — that relieved the dreadful strain in my head and throat, and brought the tears. Generally I hate to cry, but to-day it was a great relief, the tears slipping quietly down my cheeks, and dripping through my fingers as I knelt with my face between my hands.

There was a faint tap, tap of a cane on the tessellated flooring, then somebody sat down by me in the pew, and a hand was laid on my shoulder. I knew it was Fee — Jack had told him where I was!

"Poor old girl!" he said. "Seems like hard lines, — does n't it?"

I could n't answer right away, — I was struggling to get my voice under control, and quietly wiping my eyes; and still stroking my shoulder he went on presently: "It will be hard on us all, — you especially, Betty, — this going away of Nan. But it is right she should have her happiness, after giving up everything and slaving for us all these years as she has done. It 'll be tough for us, though, without her!" And he sighed heavily.

Then I sat up and faced him; I saw he was relieved that I was n't in tears. "It *is* going to be 'tough,' as you say," I remarked; "but I shall try to do my share as well as I can. It won't be Nannie, — you will all have to make allowances —" I stopped for a minute to steady my voice. "Helping papa is one of the hardest parts," I said. "I am so stupid and heedless."

"Yes," Fee said thoughtfully; then, "I think I could



"'Poor old girl!' he said."

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give him a day now and then, and by and by perhaps an hour every afternoon, — that is n't as much as Nan gives, but he might be able to get along with it. Do you think you can manage the rest?" He looked keenly at me.

I smiled, — it was a wintry affair, I am afraid, but the attempt was there anyhow. "At least I can try," I answered. "You may be sure there will be no failure if I can help it."

"I believe some girls like taking charge of a house; housekeeping and all that comes naturally to them," Fee said, still eyeing me. "But I was n't sure that you — "

"I despise it — I loathe the whole business." The words were out before I knew it. "But you must *never* tell Nan that," I eagerly impressed upon him. "If she gets the least idea of — the way I feel about it, she 'll not be willing to let me take things over — I don't say fill her place, for that I could never do. She has 'cared' well for us, Fee — you remember mamma's charge?" He nodded, and I saw his face change. "Now it is my turn; and she must marry Max and go away and be happy with him. It is my turn; and you must help me to be cheerful over it, so she will not suspect."

Felix threw his arm across my shoulder and squeezed me to him. "You are a brave little woman!" he said warmly. "Of course I 'll help you — with the *pater* and in any other way you like. Tell me what you want — at any time — and I will help you. I think the housekeeping and all that part will go well," he went on encouragingly. "You know you won't be alone in it, — there 's Miss Marston, — and as for Nurse and Cook, why, they know the ropes so well they could run the house alone."

Yes, I knew they could! but I did n't say anything about that.

He sat talking to me for a few minutes in that dear, kind way that he has sometimes, that reminds us of Nannie. Then

he rose. "Shall we go home now?" he asked. "I think it's getting toward dinner-time."

"You go on; I'll follow in a few minutes," I said, colouring up.

He understood — Fee is as quick as a flash — for, bending toward me, he turned my chin up and kissed me. "I will tell you what I *know* to be true: 'As thy days so shall thy strength be,'" he said very tenderly; then he went away and left me alone.

As I was speeding up the avenue toward home a little later, I met Max walking slowly along. He was in such deep thought that at first he did n't see me. His straw hat was pushed back, and I had time to notice the deep lines in his face, the gray hairs in his mustache and beard, and the patches of white which showed so plainly at the temples in his dark hair. Max is n't at all young — I believe ten years is the difference between himself and papa — but we have never any of us thought of him as old, and it gave me an uncomfortable little shock to notice it this afternoon. I wondered if those two and a half years of waiting for Nannie had something to do with it. And I wondered, too, that none of us had ever thought of the friendship between himself and Nannie ending like this; looking back, I saw instance after instance that should have told us, if we had n't been blind. We all loved Max and, except that marrying him took Nannie away from us, I knew everybody would be pleased. Now, at sight of his sober face, a longing to tell him of my decision seized me; and the next minute I was shaking hands with him. "Oh, Max!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "I've heard about Nannie and you — Alice told me." Then, as I saw the uneasy surprise on his face, "Of all the people in the wide world, Max, you are the one that I would be willing should have our darling Nan."

Max beamed. "Thank you, Miss Elizabeth," — that is

Nannie's name for me, but sometimes he calls me by it. "I have loved Nancy Lee since she was a wee lass," he said simply. "But for a long time I hardly dared to hope she could care for an old fellow like me. It has been a long waiting." His tone was wistful.

Here was the opportunity I wanted! I am not good at leading up to a subject, I *must* plunge headlong into it, and this I did now. "Max, I know why you have had to wait so long for Nannie." I hurried the words out as fast as I could, to keep my voice steady; gazing up at him meanwhile with what I hope was the expression of one who has joyful news to impart. "But there is no longer the least necessity for waiting — *I* am going to take charge of things at home — so Nan will be free — you and she can get married *just* as soon as ever you please."

The colour flew into Max's brown face, an eager light into his eyes. "But — can you do it?" he asked dubiously. "Does she know?"

"Not yet — and I 'm *so* glad I met you here," I rushed on. "I want you to go right to the house and see Nan and tell her all about it, — I thought you might like to be the first to tell her. Then I will have a good talk with her later. Mind, Max, that you tell her I *intend* to take over the — the housekeeping and everything — I am *de-ter-mined* to do it — whether she stays at home or not. I must learn some time or other, you know — and why not now? Nan can show me how to do everything. Now go, Max, — go to the house, and get the matter all settled." I gave him a little push. "Don't wait for me, I 'm going a block or two farther before I come in — *adios!*" I waved a finger or two airily at him, then sped past up the avenue.

Kathie opened the front door for me. "There 's something happened, but I don't know what it is," she immediately announced. "Max came in very hurriedly a while ago, and now he and papa and Felix and Nannie are shut

up in the drawing-room, talking. When I went in there a few minutes ago, papa told me to go right out; then he came and closed the door. Nan was wiping her eyes, but she didn't look a bit unhappy; so it can't be anything disagreeable. I wonder what the matter is."

"You 'll no doubt hear in good time; that will be something to live for!" I remarked encouragingly, and ran on upstairs to Alice's room.

Before her "Come in" was well spoken, I was inside the door. She stood before the bureau, giving a last touch to her gown, and the reflection in the mirror showed me a serious, downcast face. I stole behind her and slipped my arm round her waist. "Alice, forgive me, will you, dear?" I whispered. "I got in a temper; that 's the way I came to speak so unkindly to you. I am a most *selfish* creature!"

For one instant Alice's blue eyes and my green ones met each other in the mirror, then she whirled around and, catching me by the shoulders, held me off at arm's length, scrutinising me keenly. "Betty Rose! you *are* going to do it!" she exclaimed breathlessly; and when I nodded — I could n't trust myself to speak — she hugged and kissed me. "You dear, *good* girl! Oh, I am so glad, so very glad!" she kept repeating. "It will be hard at first, I know," she went on; "but you can do it, — I know you can, Betty. And by and by, next winter, if I am here, you must let me help. I have kept house for mamma for months at a time, and I should enjoy being useful. What fun we shall have! You will see. I am not the one to forgive," as I said something more about my sharp speech. "I felt as if *I* should apologise; I was afraid you might think I had taken a liberty, — had interfered in family affairs, or dictated to you. But I knew Nannie would never suggest a change. And Max seemed so unhappy — "

"Don't say those things," I hastily interrupted. "You were *perfectly* right to tell me, and I thank you for it, — I

really do. And I 'll be delighted to have your help. Imagine me at the head of this family! Picture the upheavals, the rebellion, the open warfare!" I threw out my hands, as if in mock despair, and laughed — to keep myself from crying.

"Don't anticipate any such thing as failure!" cried Alice, warmly. "You are going to do well; I know you are."

"Be sure you don't breathe a word to Nannie of my misgivings," I began. "She would only — "

A rush of feet came along the hall, a swish of skirts, and a sweet, ringing call: "Betty! Betty! Where is Miss Elizabeth? Alice, may I come in?" and there in the doorway stood Nannie. Oh, such a beautiful, joyous Nan! with cheeks as pink as damask roses, and eyes brilliant as stars; the quiet curves of her lips lost in a radiant smile. Our Nan, but glorified by hope and happiness and love.

At the sound of her voice the impulse to fly to her, to pour out on her shoulder all my trouble, to get advice and help and comfort, was almost irresistible. Oh, if I only could! Then I remembered that she, above all others, must not know of my doubts and fears, my selfish shrinking from this new responsibility. The awful loneliness which I had struggled against in church that afternoon fell on me again like a cloud. But it did n't last long this time, for almost with it came a blessed, comforting consciousness that it was through me that the fruition of Nan's happiness would come to her. Through *me!* And I had so often longed to do some great thing for her, — I loved her so. A rush of joy thrilled me from head to foot, but I could only stand and hold my hands out to Nan dumbly, — no words would come.

"Why, Betty, you dear child, what is this absurd story that Max tells me? *You* could n't take this responsibility — it would n't be fair to you — "

But I could n't endure that that unusual, joyous smile should lose the smallest fraction of its radiancy, or to see a shadow in the dear brown eyes.

"Nan! don't say a *single* word against it!" I cried out quickly. I could hear that my voice was sharp. I felt now that to have her refuse would be the greatest disappointment in the world to me.

"But you are so young, dear; there are difficulties you have not considered. I am afraid —"

But I rushed at her and stopped her mouth with a kiss. "I do know; I know *every* difficulty — and I really and truly *want* to take your place, Nan — so far as I can. I 'm three years older than you were when you began to look after us; and we are all so much more grown up that I will not have half you had to contend with. Anyway, I am going to do it, — whether you are here or not, I warn you," standing up very straight before her with a great appearance of defiance. "And it does seem to me that poor, patient Max should be considered. Ah! *please*, Nan! It is time that I knew *some*thing about keeping house — and you could show me a good deal before you go. Now, really, Nan!" I was actually pleading! and — thinking of how this would affect Nannie — I was sincerely in earnest.

Nannie eyed me as keenly as Alice had a few minutes before; but I never flinched. "I *mean* it," I said stoutly.

Then her arms went out, and I flew into them. "You *dear* little sister!" she said; and her eyes, the break in her voice, told me all she felt. We stood there without a word, holding each other tight. Tears were running down Nan's cheeks, but I did not cry. I had shed all my tears, at least for that day, in the church that afternoon.

"Hullo! what's up? Why this public and violent demonstration of affection?" cried Phil's voice. And there he was coming along the hall, looking at us — Alice's door was open. Felix was leaning on Phil's arm, and behind them loitered Jack, with — as I noticed even then, over Nan's shoulder — a beaming countenance.

"What 's up?" repeated Phil, with elegant brevity, bring-

ing the procession to a sudden halt in the hall. "If any news — what?"

While Nannie and I were unwinding ourselves from each other's arms, Fee answered. "There are two pieces of news," he said, with a twinkle of his eye at me. "L-a-r-g-e pieces of news. Nannie is engaged to Max! And — when Nan marries, Betty will be our housekeeper and look after us all!" I was so glad he did n't say "take her place," for none knew better than he that I never could do that.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" ejaculated Phil, falling up against the wall. "That fairly knocks a fellow over! Nannie! Betty!! *Unfortunate* we!!!" He gave such a groan that we had to laugh — Nannie with the tears still on her cheeks.

In less than two minutes more every member of the family, except papa, was in that hall. Who told them, or how they got to the scene of action so quickly, I can't imagine, but there they certainly were. And the tears — for some were moved to weep — and laughter, the exclamations and hugs and kisses that, as Alan said afterward, "flew around," were more than I am equal to describing; each one trying to get as near to Nan as possible, congratulating her and bemoaning her going away in the same breath.

In the midst of the hubbub Max's voice was heard from the hall below. "Do you people know that I am down here?" he called. "'A poor, lone critter, Dan'l,' — shut out from all the good times."

Everybody immediately hung over the banisters, and a chorus of voices invited him up, — Mädel and Alan racing down to be his escort.

"We have a few minutes yet before dinner — suppose we adjourn to the school-room," suggested Nannie.

"Instead of *con*gesting in this narrow hall," drawled Judge, with a confidential wink at Jack, which that young person received with lofty indifference.

Jack and I were last in the procession to the school-room. "I know I was dreadfully cross to you," I began, in an apologetic tone, "but — "

"Oh! that 's all right," interrupted Jack, slipping his hand into my arm. "I don't wonder you got worked up. Max is a nice fellow; I like him, and, of course, all this is awfully good for *him;* but it is n't for us. I declare, there is n't much comfort in having sisters if they all walk off and get married! It just makes me sick to think of Nannie's going, — I hope," very gloomily, "she 'll not marry Max for the longest time!" Then his tone changed suddenly. "Oh, say, — *I've* got something to tell you, — something fine!"

"For goodness' sake! *you* are not going to be married, too!" I exclaimed, sitting down suddenly on the nearest step.

Jack's expression of disgust was very funny. "Don't be silly!" he said severely, then, with a broad smile: "It 's something a thousand times better than that. You remember — oh, pshaw! there comes that young snooper, Judge. Never mind, I 'll tell you this evening, — I know you 'll think it 's *fine!*"

XVII.

A WEDDING BY THE SEA.

TOLD BY BETTY.

BUT there was so much going on that evening that not until the next morning did I hear Jack's wonderful news. Murray Unsworth and Helen called, and Mrs. Erveng and Hilliard came round to tell Alice of their final arrangement to start for the Berkshires the following Friday, — three days later. Of course they were all astonished to hear of Nannie's engagement to Max, and, after the first surprise had passed off, everybody declared, as we had, that the two were just suited to each other, or, as Mrs. Erveng expressed it, "One was the complement of the other." And congratulations were many and hearty. Hilliard was to escort his mother and cousin to their country place, and then go to Boston and take a position in his father's publishing house.

"I feel so much more cheerful about it now that I have made up my mind, — thanks to you," he said to me that evening. "I shall endeavour to give my whole attention to business, and shall stick faithfully to it. But in August I shall take a run on to New York —" He paused. "Your brothers have invited me to come down to the Cottage then for a day or two. Shall I come, Betty?" His sleepy eyes were wide opened, and the expression in them, the earnestness in his slow voice, appealed to me in a most unexpected manner. For a moment the temptation to answer him as my heart dictated was almost irresistible. Then I remembered what was ahead of me, the solemn decision I had come to that afternoon in the church, and I said, as off-

hand as I could, — not meeting his eyes but for one brief glance: "Why, certainly, come, — we shall all be very glad to see you. I am to take Nannie's place in the family and look after everything when she goes, so I shall be busy all summer taking lessons, — learning to order breakfasts and dinners, and all the other secrets of what is called 'housekeeping.' I expect to be a 'busy bee' this summer, sir," with a great air of pride, "not an idle butterfly as usual. So you may not see a great deal of me. But the boys will be on hand. Jack will be there; Phil comes down twice a week; and Fee will have his holidays in August, — to say nothing of the younger children, who will, I know, be only too happy to tag on wherever you go. So I can promise you will have plenty of company."

"You will take Nannie's place; but only for a while." It was a statement rather than a question; but both voice and eyes were uneasy.

I shook my head. "Not for a while, but forever and aye," I said in the same cheerful manner. "I am going to be the old maid of the family, — you know there should be one in every family, — and look after papa, admonish the older ones, train up the younger ones, — oh, what ornaments to the world *they* will turn out under my tuition! — and take general care of everything and every one. *Such* a useful person as I shall be, — Elizabeth Rose, O. M.," and I made him a sweeping courtesy. I knew he was disgusted with my flippancy, — I saw it in his face. The look he gave me was like those of the old girl and boy days when I had been hoidenish or boasted of some tomboyish trick. Without a word he turned and walked away.

I had offended him, — disgusted him! Well, I told myself, better so, much better. Better to end it all now, — while I could.

Then I ran upstairs to my room, where Mädel lay asleep, and stood in the dark closet with the door shut and my face

pressed close up against the clothes which hung there for a while, before I could go back to the drawing-room and meet everybody.

I saw Hilliard but once again, — a couple of days later, — the morning he and his mother called to take Alice to the Berkshires. And then, in the excitement of parting with our dear Alice, there was small time for any words between us, — just a hand-clasp and a polite phrase or two. Then they were off.

We missed Alice dreadfully; even papa. Nannie and I felt so lonely! — Nora gone, and now Alice! Felix never says much about his feelings, so we could n't tell, at least I could n't, how much or little he missed her; but Phil made no secret of his loneliness. Not having Nonie to confide in, he was driven to unbosom himself to Nan. If talking continually of a person is any sign of affection, then Phil must be *very* fond of Alice.

"I made up my mind I 'd 'put it to the touch and win or lose it all,' that last day, and I watched for my chance to speak to her," I heard him tell Nannie one day. "But when the opportunity came, what did I do," in a tone of disgust, "but weaken! Just stood there like a great booby, — without a word to say for myself. She must have thought me a precious fool! I was actually afraid to say what I felt, — for fear she would refuse. And yet I don't see why she should," straightening up, and throwing back his head. "Only that I 'm not clever," lapsing into a tone of gloom. "What 's your opinion, Nancy Lee? Think there is a chance for me? Would n't you — if you were me — ask her when she comes to the Cottage?" For Alice is to spend a few weeks with us during the summer, and then go back to her aunt, to Endicott Beach, until the fall.

Nannie hesitated. "Phil, dear," she said gently, "I think it might be better — for you — not to speak to Alice at all."

Phil's colour faded a little. "You mean that she does n't care a brass farthing for me?" he demanded; then, with sudden wrath, and a flood of angry red over his handsome face. "You 're a nice one to encourage a fellow! For some reason or other, you don't want me to ask Alice to marry me. Well, I am going to do it all the same, — the very first chance I get. Wish to goodness I had the time to run up to Bar Harbor and talk to Nonie!" And glaring at poor unoffending me, who had just entered the room, he stalked off to pour out his feelings in a long letter to Nora.

But you need n't think that this little tiff ended his confidences to Nannie. Phil rarely holds malice long against anybody, and the next day saw him going over the same old ground again.

But I must tell you what I heard from Jack that morning.

As we came up from breakfast he drew me into the drawing-room, which was empty. "I guess you 've been just *wondering* what it was I had to tell you," he said, with a funny little air of mystery. To tell the truth, my mind had been so full of other things that I had never given Jack's secret a thought. "Well, I 've got ten or fifteen minutes before I start for school, so here it is. You remember that story of mine, — about the Lark? — 'The Passing of our Little Brother the Lark'?" he paused, looking at me with very bright eyes, struggling to keep his lips from widening in a smile.

Of course, I guessed at once; but to say so would have spoiled his pleasure, so I merely remarked carelessly: "Well, is it another victim of 'non-appreciation'? Has it come back?"

"*No!*" cried Jack, joyfully. "But something else has come. Just — look — at — *this!*" He sat down, pulled a letter from his pocket, and, opening it, drew forth a long, narrow slip of stiff paper. All this was done slowly, with

evident intense enjoyment of each detail. "Read that!" he said, holding out the slip to me.

One glance was enough! "Jack *Rose!*" I gasped incredulously. "A check for twenty-five *dollars!* You don't mean to say —" Words failed me.

"Yes — actually," nodded Jack, with a smile of such supreme satisfaction that I had to join in it. "Twenty-five dollars for that *simple* story! Think of it, Betty! I almost feel as if the editors must 've made a mistake. But it is n't a mistake — it could n't be," a little anxiously; "for see — the sum is written out in full twice — and besides, listen to what they say." Jack and I crowded into one of the big drawing-room chairs and read the letter together, — I over his shoulder, he aloud, slowly and impressively: —

MY DEAR SIR, — Enclosed find our check for twenty-five dollars in payment for your story, "Passing of our Little Brother the Lark," which we have accepted. If you have any other stories of a similar character, we should be pleased to see them.

Yours very truly,

—— —— ——.

"Well," I exclaimed, when the reading was over, "that is certainly encouraging. Now I suppose you 'll be sending them that precious bundle from under the sofa — Mowgli and all — post-haste. When? Better at once, and make the most of your opportunity."

But Jack shook his head. "That 's what bothers me," he said, looking worried. "None of those are like the 'Lark' — they are all about fighting and adventures, and that sort of thing. I 'll have to wait until I write another, and I don't know just when that will be; because, you know, my stories have to come to me, — I have to just see and feel them before I can write them. And by that time," mournfully, "those editors may not want it."

"But why not send the stories you have?" I urged. "The editors might take a fancy to some; try them, at any rate. Think if they even took two or three!"

But he was not to be moved. "They say 'of a similar character,' and those stories are not," he said quietly.

"You *are* the most obstinate creature!" I declared, getting up from the chair, provoked.

Curiosity, however, got the better of my indignation, and I asked presently, interrupting Jack, who was fondly rereading his letter: "Are n't you going to tell papa and the rest of the family? And what will you do with all that money?"

"Well, I want to give each of the family something," Jack said, answering my last question first. "You must help me make out a list. Then some of it goes to church; and I thought perhaps with the rest I could get myself a suit of clothes. You know I need 'em, and that would save papa handing out for it. What do you think?"

"Why, yes," I agreed, "that is a good idea. But — are you behind with your church money?" It is papa's rule that if any of us are unable to be at church one Sunday, our offering is put aside and added to what we lay on the plate the following Sunday. We never think of spending that money; and I was surprised at what Jack's words seemed to imply.

"Oh, my, no!" he cried quickly; then, with the blood rushing to his face: "But — well — I thought I would like to give some of this money; a tenth of my allowance is such a *little* bit, Betty. And this is the first time I 've ever had a large sum of my own. So I thought I would put — one fifth — on the plate — you know — to make up for those other times. There 'll still be lots left."

"Well," I said gently; then, "Why, you 've got the whole sum laid out."

"Yes, I did it last night, after I was in bed — I could n't

sleep," Jack answered; "and, Betty, I wonder if it would n't be enough for just Nannie and you to know this, without telling papa and all the others? You see, papa is such a great writer that the 'Lark' would seem very silly to him; and I know some of the others would make fun of it. I really *would n't* like Judge to see it."

His big, gray eyes had such an anxious, appealing expression in them that I said hastily: "Judge is an impudent little goose! You are very foolish to mind anything that he says. But I think you ought to tell papa," I added. "Suppose you talk it over with Nannie, and see what she says. Could n't you do it now?"

"Goodness, no!" exclaimed Jack, in a startled tone. "Why, I 'm almost due at school now — I forgot all about the time. 'Bye!" Snatching up his hat and books, he flew out of the front door and down the steps at a great pace.

"This is one of the things I shall have to settle when Nannie is gone," I said to myself, after Jack had left me, with a little sinking of the heart. "I 'll never feel sure that what seems to me to be right is right, — there will be no Nan to confirm my judgment."

It was a great relief to me, therefore, when, later on, Jack confided his story to Nannie, to hear that she — as I had — strongly advised that papa should be told. Nan was astonished, perfectly *amazed*, to find that Jack could write, and she urged that the family should know, and enjoy the story. But that Jack would not agree to. Papa was not nearly so surprised as Nannie and I expected; he took the matter in the calmest way, and very readily allowed Jack to spend the twenty-five dollars as he had planned.

About ten days after that, Miss Marston left us for her summer holidays, — now that so many of us are grown up, she does n't "escort" us to the country any more, — and the family went down to the Cottage, that is, all but Phil, who was to come once during the week and always over Sunday.

Fee, too, spent some time of each week in town, coming down with Phil on Wednesday afternoon and remaining with us the rest of the week, or going up with him Thursday morning and returning Saturday.

Generally I enjoy our summers at the Cottage, — the rowing, sailing, bathing, and free out-door life are just what I love; but this year everything was *so* different! Instead of being in or on the water, and on the sands from morning till evening, I had to stick in the house a good part of the time, following Nannie from room to room and up and down stairs, learning all the dull, stupid, uninteresting details of housekeeping. Oh, how I *hated* it! If only I could have given vent to my feelings by speaking out my mind, or a sharp exclamation, — even an angry toss or flounce would have been a relief. But no! that would have showed Nan how I loathed what Phil calls "the whole business;" and that I would n't have had for the *world!* So I wreathed my face in smiles, and tried to act in my usual manner. I don't think Nan suspected what even that poking around the house cost me. But I *had* to break away now and then, on some excuse or other; then I would rush off somewhere where no one could see me, and sometimes I would ask for help, but I have to confess that most times I 'd just stand there and stamp, and shake and flounce, and say sharp things out loud for a few minutes. After that usually I could go back to Nan and be equal to some more of the smiling and agreeable.

I thought the hardship was all on my side, but looking back now I can see that I must have tried Nannie a good deal. With the greatest patience, she would show me how to do certain things, — her special duties, — going carefully over and over them; and by the next morning — sometimes ten minutes later — I remembered no more about them than if I had never been told. I think that Kathie, who loved to hang on and listen to all Nan said, gained more than I did. Sometimes I got very discouraged, for I really did want to

fill Nan's place as well as I could; but she would say in that sweet, bright way of hers: "Don't look so dismal, Miss Elizabeth, you will come out all right, I am sure. You must not expect to learn everything in a day; why, it took me years. And, you know, we have the whole summer before us in which to give and to take lessons."

But, as it happened, we had not.

Max used to come down every week and stay over Sunday, and sometimes he would put in an appearance on Wednesdays besides, with Felix and Phil. We are all fond of Max; and these visits of his were a great satisfaction to me. While he was at the Cottage I always felt more resigned to the heavy responsibility I was to undertake, — in fact, willing. The love between Nannie and himself was so beautiful that I enjoyed watching them. They were n't one bit spoony, — I *detest* that! — any more than were Chad and Nora; but no one with eyes could be in their company and not know that they two loved each other dearly. Without parading it, Max made no secret of his devotion to his "little Nancy Lee." No matter how occupied he might be, or how deep in conversation with papa or anybody else, he always seemed to know just where Nan was in the room and what she was doing. As for Nan, the happy light in her brown eyes, the sweet pink in her cheeks, as well as the new joyousness in her voice, told what she felt. And there was that in their manner to each other — a certain indefinable something — which gave me the feeling that they thoroughly understood and were congenial to each other.

I was n't the only person who enjoyed the pretty love story that was before us. Phil used to mutter, "Lucky dog!" in an envious sort of tone, and go off for long, solitary walks. There was a wistful light in Felix's eyes sometimes as he saw how completely his twin belonged to Max; though Fee was more than glad of Nan's happiness for her sake, for his own sake, and the sake of us all, I am sure he dreaded

the time when Max would claim her. As for Jack — well, the absorbed way he stared at those two engaged people was enough to have put them out of countenance. Papa, too, — I 've seen him sit on the piazza and gaze and gaze at Max and Nannie as they walked up and down the beach. He has taken this affair much better than any of us anticipated. "I suppose I should not expect to always keep my daughters," he said, that day in the drawing-room, when Max asked for Nannie. "She has been a devoted daughter; she will be a good wife."

Fee told us this, and he says that when Nannie began something about "not feeling that she could leave the family," papa interrupted her. "My dear," he said, "you have more than done your duty to us. You deserve your happiness. And we must see to it that we be not selfish in this matter." He took Nan in his arms and kissed her and then put her hand in Max's. So papa's consent was freely given.

He looked very serious at times, though. Felix had already begun giving him help with his work, and Fee's help papa prefers to that of any one else; but I think he was troubled about my taking charge when Nannie was gone. Papa has not much confidence in my executive powers. Well, I can't blame him for that — I certainly have n't much confidence in them myself, in the housekeeping line.

Though nothing definite had been agreed on, we all had an idea that the wedding would take place in the fall, after our return to the city. But late one Thursday afternoon Max appeared at the Cottage, and before he left for New York the next morning it was settled that he and Nannie should be married on June 29th — just two weeks later! Very unexpectedly Max had to go West to take charge of an important law case which might detain him there for two or three months; and he suddenly determined to coax Nan to let their wedding be at once, so she could go with him.

We were all dreadfully upset by the suddenness of the proposition, and for a while Nannie declared it would be impossible at such short notice. But Max had set his heart on it, and pleaded so earnestly that papa and Felix went over to his side, and pretty soon the rest of the family followed. As Fee said, "It was n't as if they had just become engaged; Max had been waiting over two years and a half for Nannie. And if he wanted this, she and all of us ought to give in." And I really think that settled the matter finally.

The next two weeks were busy ones, I can tell you, but they were very happy as well — until that last day when Nan left us!

There was very little fuss over her preparations; "Let us make it a quiet little home wedding, and have just the family," she begged. "Then, in the fall, if we like, we can hold a reception, and invite all our friends." So it was as she wished. I think, and so does Jack, that Nan did this because she knew that papa had spent all the ready money he could spare on Nora. We think this because we know our blessed, unselfish Nan so well; but she said not a word to give us such an impression. And for all there was much to be accomplished in those two weeks, she made time to do lots of things for the children and about the house that would make matters easier for me when I began my management.

Of course we were all very much excited over the wedding, but it was a pleasant excitement, and except for a few slight squabbles, — which seem to be inevitable in a large family, — everything went off beautifully smooth.

Nora and Chad telegraphed that they would be with us early on the morning of June 29th, and Alice came down with Felix and Phil the afternoon before. We were all *so* glad to see her! Our boys had great boxes of sweet peas — they are Nan's favourite flower — sent from town, and on the wedding morning we arranged them lavishly about the

Cottage. The bridal bouquet was of the same dainty butterfly blossoms.

Alice says Nan's wedding was one of the prettiest she has ever attended; it was certainly delightfully unconventional, and unlike Nora's "elegant function." Right after breakfast came Max; he had walked over from the hotel in the village, where he and his mother were staying. He chatted with papa, helped us decorate the rooms, and sat on the piazza talking with Nan until it was time to go and, as he expressed it, "put on his gala attire." Then Nan ran off to dress.



"She looked sweet."

Her wedding gown was very simple, compared with Nora's, but she looked *sweet* in it. She is not beautiful; but to my mind she has the sweetest, dearest face in all the world. One can see her noble, patient, loyal soul shining out of her beautiful brown eyes, and to us, who love her so well, with the pretty red going and coming in her cheeks this morning, and that radiant smile on her lips, she looked

better than beautiful. *Dear* Nan! I *love* her! As Jack said one day, in that odd way of his, "I 'm sure Nan's crown in heaven will have more jewels in it than there 'll be in any of the rest of ours. She is so *lovingly* good, Betty!"

The ceremony was at noon, and as the little church was only a good stone's-throw from the Cottage, matting was laid along the lane, and the bridal party walked to St. Peter's. Alice, Kathie, Mädel, and I called ourselves Nan's bridesmaids; Phil and Jack were the ushers; and Fee was master of ceremonies. After waiting as late as we could for Nora and Chad, Felix had just got us all out of doors and was marshalling us into our proper places, when they drove up. There was barely time to give Nonie a kiss, and to see that she was looking more beautiful than ever in one of her "swellest" gowns; then we fell into line and the bridal party started.

That was the loveliest walk! with the water reflecting the exquisite blue of the June skies, and dancing and sparkling in the sunlight, as if powdered over with diamond dust; with the delicious sea-breeze whispering among the trees and wafting to us the sweet, spicy odours of the spruce and pine and cedars which grew along the lane. Most of us knew — I with the sorest kind of conviction — that for us a sorrowful, lonely time would surely follow; but for to-day we were entirely happy.

Though our party was not large, the church was full to overflowing, for the fisher folk of the village and their wives and "bairnies" had crowded in to see "Miss Nannie married." They knew us all well; they had seen Nan grow up from a slip of a girl into a woman; she had been with many of them in sickness and trouble, and now they felt they had a share in her joy and happiness. Nora was a marvel to them, in her beauty and fashionable attire; but Nannie was their own. She came down the aisle smiling, and bowing to right and left; and knowing that "a word

with the bride, a look at the groom" meant a good deal in their narrow lives, she stood outside the little gray church for a few minutes, leaning on her husband's arm, with the sunshine falling on her bonnie brown hair, and held a reception among her humble friends.

I think papa was pleased — mamma used to be very fond of her "fisher folk" — he looked so tenderly at Nan; and we all understood, and grouped ourselves about her as picturesquely as we could, so as to add to the interest of the scene. I caught Chad's supercilious glance and Nora's answering apologetic smile; but who cared? Nora had had her wedding to suit herself, and why should n't Nan?

Then we trooped back through the lane to the house, Nan walking between Max and papa, with the train of her gown over her arm, and the rest of us in whatever order we pleased, all in the best of spirits.

The wedding luncheon was simple, but Cook can rise to an occasion; and Nannie, Alice, and I had arranged the table. If I do say it, — "as should n't," — it would have been hard to find a daintier or more delicious feast anywhere. Even Chad signified his approval, and Nonie said, with an indulgent smile: "Of course, it 's all very unconventional and unusual, but I must admit that I have enjoyed myself."

For an hour or two after luncheon we sat about in the little drawing-room and on the piazza and chatted, Nora giving us girls an animated description of the advantages of Chad's cottage at Bar Harbor, and of the attentions she had received.

But the dreaded, inexorable time of parting came. We had promised each other we would be cheerful — for Nan's sake; but some of us had to give in at the last. Papa's voice failed entirely while he was blessing Nan; he just held her close to him for a minute or two in silence, then

he kissed her and put her quickly into Max's arms, and went away to his study, locking the door behind him.

The sight of papa's agitation set the children off, and the last few moments were full of excitement. But with it all Nan managed that she and I should have a few minutes alone together. "Dear," she said tenderly, "I feel as if I were doing a mean thing to leave you alone with this heavy responsibility. The time has been so short — I have not been able to show you half that I should. And I am afraid that will make everything so much harder for you! Oh, I have been selfish!"

I was trying so hard to control myself, — there would be time afterward, I thought, to cry, — but the touch of her dear hand, the loving tenderness of her voice, broke me down. "*You* selfish!" I cried, wheeling round on her. "You dear, blessed saint on earth! Oh, Nan!" the tears had it all their own way by now. "You have been mother, sister — *everything* to us! 'T is n't what I shall have to do — but you — *you* — Oh, what shall I do without *you!*"

Nan held me to her, and soothed and kissed and petted me in that way of hers which is like no one's else. "Two months will soon slip by," she said encouragingly; "and then I shall be back again. Perhaps — but don't you tell any one just yet — perhaps Max and I will come home and spend September here at the Cottage. I should enjoy it — then you and I can keep house together. Would n't that be jolly?" Then, as Max called, "Nan! time to start," she caught my face between her two hands, and kissed me good-bye. "I shall always feel that Max and I owe our happiness to you — my dearest sister!" she said with quivering lips. "God be with you!"

Everybody crowded around; there were tears and embraces; good wishes and blessings that died away half spoken; a last kiss to Felix; the carriage wheels crunching on the gravel drive; a wave at the turn of the road, — and

they were out of sight. Max had won his wife, and we had lost our best friend!

I was so unhappy that the departure of the others — Mrs. Derwent and Nora and Chad and Alice — made little impression on me, though Nonie was very kind. "I am afraid it will be very dull and stupid for you here this summer, Betty," she said, in that matter-of-fact way she has. "But don't get discouraged; when the winter comes *I* will see that you have some good times. And I think Nannie will too. I had no idea this was going to happen — though — don't you remember? — I prophesied another wedding soon! But I expected it would have been Phil and Alice."

Alice, too, had words of cheer. "Keep a brave heart, Betty," she whispered lovingly. "I am so sorry I can't stay now; but you will see me back in a few weeks, for a nice visit. Until then, good-bye, you dear, brave girl!"

I had to stay and see them all off, and be cheerful and pleasant; but as the last carriage rolled away I darted upstairs to my own room, and, shutting the door, I fell on the bed and cried bitterly.

I should have liked to stay there, for my head and my heart were both aching, but presently came a knock at the door. Opening it quietly, Jack stepped in. "I 'm so sorry to disturb you, Betty," he said, — he looked worried, and his tone of voice was dismal, — "but Felix thinks you had better come down and see to things. The children are making such a racket! — just going from one thing to the other. Phil has tried to quiet 'em, but he is as cross as two sticks. And papa is getting annoyed."

"Do you suppose *I* can do any good?" I questioned, with quivering lips, sitting up on the side of the bed and giving a final dab to my eyes.

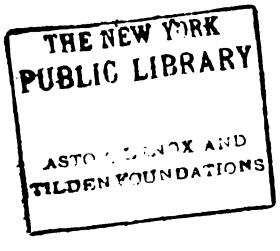
"Well, you could try," Jack answered briefly.

So I got up, and bathed my eyes and went down.



"'I have not been able to show you half that I should.'"




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Fee had got papa out on the piazza, and was talking to him, trying to keep him so interested that he would not notice the din in the drawing-room; though he — Felix — looked white and spent, with black circles under his eyes, — anything but equal to it. But the brave spirit was there. Phil was striding about the little drawing-room, a frown between his eyebrows, sharpness in his voice, as he let the children know what he thought of their behaviour.

But for all the effect his words had he might have saved his breath. These younger ones are not afraid of annoying papa as we used to be; they are the most daring creatures! Kathie was playing a noisy waltz on the piano, and encouraging Paul to beat time with those abominable cymbals, while Mädel and Alan were chasing each other around the room, giggling in high glee. As fast as Phil seated one, the other jumped up and raced around the room, dodging about so as not to be caught, falling over the furniture, and making a great deal of noise. I wondered that papa had said nothing.

I tried to think of what Nannie would have done. "Kathie," I said, going quickly forward, "don't make that noise, dear; it disturbs papa. He feels badly about" — I could n't keep the quiver out of my voice — "about Nan's going. Put away the cymbals for this afternoon, Judge —"

To my surprise, Judge put the cymbals immediately behind his back, and Kathie broke in, looking a little ashamed: "Well, Nurse won't let us go on the beach, and there was nothing to do, and Judge wanted —"

"I just wish — Nannie — was back!" wailed Mädel, the tears starting to her eyes.

"So do I," chimed in Alan; while Phil plucked at his mustache with a look of despair.

"Betty!" called Felix from the piazza, "father says to sing something."

I felt as if I *could n't;* but Phil whispered, "Yes, do; and keep at it — 'music hath charms' — you may quiet the little savages." And Jack quietly placed one of my favourite songs before me; so I sat down and sang it: —

"A sorrower went his way along,
And I heard him sing and say:
'The noon is bright, but soon the night
Will come — the grave of day.'
Then I smiled to hear his woful song,
And sent this word for nay:
'The noon is bright, but the blackest night
Cradles another, another day.'"

The children were very quiet when I finished, and Felix called out: "We like that — sing it again."

And as I went over and over the brave words, they gave me courage and comfort, — sunshine followed night, so peace might follow sorrow.

"Now, Betty, play something that we can *all* sing," clamoured Judge.

My poor head! I knew well what a "family" song meant!

But before I could say anything Jack came to the rescue: "Suppose we sing 'O Mother dear, Jerusalem,'" he suggested. "We all know it so well, there 's no need of an accompaniment. But just give us the key, Betty." Which I did; and they all roared as loud as they pleased.

This was the first evening, — oh, how my heart sank at the prospect for the future!

XVIII.

A FUSS IN THE FAMILY.

TOLD BY JACK.

BETTY *is* the queerest girl! Really, I don't think there is another like her in all the world. The morning after the wedding she said to me: "Did you notice how quickly the children obeyed last evening? That was because I spoke so quietly, — as Nan would have done. Oh, *dear!* if I could only keep as cool and gentle and dignified as she does! I am sure I should get on nicely with everybody. But the trouble is, I get provoked, and then — good-bye to all patience and dignity! I 'll tell you what you could do, Jack, — when you see me flying into a temper just say 'Nan!' very quickly. No one but I would understand, and it might help me."

"Yes, if I 've time to say it; you get mad in a flash sometimes," I reminded her.

"I know it," she admitted, with a sigh — Betty is very honest in owning up to a fault. "And the worst is, that I don't seem able to help it. I make the most beautiful resolutions; but when the test comes I find that they usually go to pieces like pie-crust. What is to be done with such a person? I do wish I had a disposition like Nan's!" She looked very sober, and drummed a dismal tattoo on the table with her fingers.

"Don't you worry about that; we are all used to you, and we don't really mind," I said to encourage her. "Just go on and do your best."

But the next minute she wheeled round on me with a sudden look of determination. "What is to prevent my being like Nan — if I try hard enough?" she demanded. "I know every *one* of her ways; I have n't lived with her ever since I was born for nothing. See here!" she pointed her forefinger at me, "if I can only be like Nan — get her cool, calm, gentle manner, I *know* I can make the children obey me — last evening proved that — and the servants, too. Otherwise, as my natural self, I mean, I have the most dismal conviction that I shall fail, — be disobeyed, defied, and get so provoked that I shall be in hot water the whole time. I 'll begin by just cultivating her manner, and perhaps," dubiously, "by and by some of her blessed spirit may come to me. Yes; I think — I — *will* — try." She nodded her head at every word, staring thoughtfully at me. "Well, is n't it a good plan?" she asked, suddenly, very briskly.

I was pretty sure she could n't carry it through; but I hated to put a damper on her, so I hesitated a little. "Yes, if you *could*," I said. "But — "

"'But me no buts,'" she broke in impatiently. "I am *going* to do it, so that settles the question. Of course I shall have to act very differently, but I think I can — at least I can try. But don't you say anything to the others about my scheme. Do you hear? That would spoil the whole thing." Then, before I could answer, she jumped up: "Oh, goodness! here am I loitering, and there are a million things — more or less — to be done. Well; make your exit, Betty Rose," she waved her hand and gave her foot a kick, as if "expediting," as Phil calls it, somebody the room. "Enter a miserable substitute for Nancy Now, Miss Substitute, bestir yourself, and see to it do your duty. Jack, just suppose this were a transof souls — *would n't* Max be sorry of his bare made a face at me, then, quick as a flash, features into a most serious expression, and

walked out of the room with a great pretence of dignity. A moment later I heard her giving Hannah an order in a grave, almost solemn voice, that I could hardly have known for Betty's.

I did n't suppose she was really in earnest about imitating Nan, or that she could do it; but it seems that she was; and the change in her manner was so extraordinary that nobody — but myself — knew what to make of it.

Nan is one of the quiet kind; she can accomplish the greatest lot of work, and you would hardly know it from any fuss she 'd make. She 's patient and gentle, and she very seldom scolds; but when she says a thing has *got* to be done, why, somehow everybody knows there is nothing left but to do it.

Now Betty is just the other way; not that she ever shirks — that is n't her style — but she works so terribly hard over things, that everybody hears and knows when she is at 'em. She is as variable as an April day, — she 'll be whimsical and most serious, teasing, tender, domineering, and as gentle as a lamb, all in one breath, as it were. She 'll change her mind fifty times a day, if she feels like it, and the way she flies from one subject to another is enough to confuse anybody; really, sometimes I don't know if she is in fun or earnest. Betty is a good deal livelier than Nan; and I must say that she has got more pluck and daring than any other girl I know. But she is awfully headlong, and — in the way of temper — like gunpowder. She and Nannie are about as *un*like as two people could possibly be. Yet for the first few weeks after she took over the house, what did Betty do but undertake to model herself after the pattern of Nannie! Of course, with her nature, she could no more be like Nannie than papa could be like Betty; she only succeeded in being entirely unlike herself.

All her smiles and funny little ways vanished; she sailed around the house as solemn as an owl, giving orders and

looking after the children with an air which Phil declared was one of "stern and lofty dignity."

This was so *very* different from her usual manner that people could n't help noticing it. Nurse declared that "the pore child was shorely worriting herself for Miss Nannie," or "mebbe layin' for a spell of sickness," and in their sympathy and anxiety she and Cook showed themselves much more reasonable and willing to take orders than Betty had expected. As for the children — well, when, instead of flying out and giving them the tremendous rowing they often richly deserved, and which they expected, she would eye them solemnly and begin in a cold, mild voice with: "Now, Kathie, dear," or "Come, boys, we will talk this matter over," etc., they were so stunned, so perfectly amazed, that before they knew it they were obeying without even a murmur. Of course, this was just what Betty was working for; I understood that, but the others did n't, and they wondered what under the sun ailed her. But Betty would not let me explain.

"If you *dare* to tell, Jack Rose!" she began wrathfully, when I merely suggested it, "I shall" — then she suddenly caught herself — "I shall be seriously annoyed." The stiff, precise tone in which she finished up was so funny — coming from her — that I burst out laughing. And I think it was as much as she could do to keep from joining in it.

Quite often I 've wished — I guess we all have — that Betty was n't so heedless and imperious; but when she kept up this new way of acting day in and day out, I got so sick and tired of it that really it would have been a relief to have her fly into a temper and just speak her mind out. Of course it was all very well for her to try to be amiable and sensible like Nan, but the trouble was she went too far — that is Betty all over! She seemed to think she must be forever at some work or other, and as for seriousness — well, I *never* thought Betty could make herself such a wet blanket on

everything; sometimes for days she would n't even smile, going round the house as solemnly as if she had all the cares of the world on her shoulders.

Everybody noticed it. Fee was really worried; he asked me to find out, on the quiet, if anything more was troubling her than the responsibility of her new duties; and I could see that he put himself out to help her in lots of little ways. Phil teased her openly. He declared he was as hungry for information as Rosa Dartle herself, and "implored" her to confide in him whether it was by swallowing the poker that she had got that iron expression; and a lot more nonsense like that. But Betty neither smiled nor answered saucily; she just ignored him.

Even papa noticed how different she was, and asked once or twice, looking rather anxiously at her through his glasses: "My dear, are you quite well?" And Betty would answer, in that prim, little voice she was cultivating: "Yes, thank you, papa, quite well."

The consequence was things at the Cottage those days were about as flat and stupid as they could be. Deadly dull was n't the name for it! No Nannie, no Nora, and with this new dismal Betty, who was enough to give one the blues!

You see, naturally Betty is the kind of person that makes a house lively. We were used to having her flying in and out of the Cottage all day long, on the beach, in the water, everywhere, ready for a lark, and getting up all sorts of fun for us all; with a merry word here, a saucy speech there; dashing off a gay waltz on the piano, or trilling snatches of some song, at the top of her voice, full of jolly nonsense and good spirits. Nannie has always said Betty was like a sunbeam in the house; and I knew she could be splendid company when she chose; but I guess the others only came to realise it this summer.

Now she never touched the piano, unless it was in the evenings to keep the children quiet; never stirred out for a

row or swim or game or even a walk; her one idea seemed to be just *devoting* herself to that miserable old housekeeping and what she calls her "duties," from morning until night, going from one task to another as if she were an automaton that could n't stop until it ran down. And, of course, pretty soon that sticking in the house began to pull her down. Though she is just as strong and healthy as she can be, Betty has never had a bright, steady colour like the other girls; it only comes in her cheeks at times, — in soft, pink spots, with tiny white streaks between, as if some one 'd laid a finger hard on her flesh, — and *I* think it 's even prettier than if it stayed always. But these days she was pale *all* the time, — you see she was n't out of doors enough to get tanned, — and her face began to look real thin. I can't tell you how I talked to Betty, — I scolded, I coaxed, — urging her to give up that silly pretence of being somebody else; but it was no use; I could n't budge her.

In the way of managing and having things go smoothly Betty had, so far, done better than any of us expected. And she insisted that it was all due to this new manner of hers.

"I cannot be dignified and sweet at the same time like Nannie; I 've found that out," she told me, when I talked to her one day about the way she was acting; "but I *can* be dignified and *austere*," — the air with which she brought that word out! "And you must admit, Jack, that it works well; I never expected to get along so easily with Nurse and Cook. You see," she glanced hurriedly over her shoulder, and dropped her voice to a confidential whisper, "I gave them a grand surprise! Why," the corners of her mouth quivered with fun, "they have n't got over it yet; they don't know *what* to make of me. In the mean time, they are all giving in and obeying orders See? Now, the thing is — can I keep it up?" She sighed heavily, and put on a pensive expression that provoked me.

"I just hope you can't," I said, I guess pretty sharply;

I was all out of patience with her that day. "I think it 's *too* silly for anything to act as you 're doing."

Well, that did set her off!

"Silly! Oh, you do, eh? Too bad!" she began coolly, then all at once she got very mad. "You would n't think it was very 'silly' if *you* had to do it. 'Silly' indeed! I always thought you were a tremendously dense specimen. Do you suppose I do this for *fun?* I tell you," her voice got a little shaky, "I *have* to do it to make the children and the servants mind me. If I should rush about singing and laughing and carrying on as I used to, who do you suppose would pay any attention to my orders or respect me as the mistress of the house? The children would n't; Nurse would order me around as if I were two years old, and Cook — would simply own the house, and us as well! How would you all like *that?* Then it would be — 'Oh, Betty is such a useless person! — so *very* incapable!'" She drew down the corners of her mouth, and mimicked what she supposed would be the family tone. "And still no one would be happy. And if I choose to take all day to accomplish what Nannie did in one hour, why, that 's my affair — not yours. And I will look as solemn and 'owly' as I please. So no more interference, Mr. Jack Rose."

"But, Betty, you 're not expected to do so much; you will tire yourself all out, and get sick. I know papa would much rather — "

But Betty interrupted. "If you are n't the most determined — persistent boy!" she exclaimed indignantly, and with that parting shot she flounced out of the room. For the next few days she was stiffer and more solemn than ever; she seemed to just begrudge herself any enjoyment.

Well, I knew this was n't right, and while I hate to tell things that people don't want me to, I finally made up my mind that I would explain the whole affair to Fee when he came down on Wednesday, and let him give Betty a talking to. Or

perhaps I would write to Nan — though, of course, that would be the last resort. It was on a Tuesday afternoon I came to this decision. Phil and Felix were in the city; and I was before the bureau brushing my hair for dinner when some one came skurrying along the hall; there was a quick rap on our door, and almost before I could get out, "Come!" Betty bounced in.

She looked very pale, and there was a strained, anxious expression about her face. I knew at once that something was up, and turned to meet her without finishing my hair. "Well?" I said expectantly, still holding on to the brush.

Betty sat down on the end of a cushioned, chintz-covered box which we have for a lounge along the wall in our room. "Well," she remarked, — there was a catch in her voice, — "the farce has come to an end. The 'austere' individual has died a violent death! *Don't* stand and stare at me with your mouth open," she flirted her handkerchief at me; but I don't believe I had my mouth open at all — as if I would! "In plain English, Jack, I 've given up pretending to be a substitute for Nannie. I will try to be patient; and I will continue to do my very best for the family, — but it must be in my own way. I cannot — I *will not* go through again what I have these weeks since Nan went away."

You would have imagined that somebody had forced her to act in that silly way! "Why, Betty, nobody wanted you to do it," I could n't help but remind her.

But she went straight on, without paying the slightest attention to what I said. "I *know* that the moment I go back to my own way of acting I shall have trouble," — this in a tone of despair. "The children and those two old autocrats in the nursery and the kitchen will pay small heed to me, — I shall simply be a door-mat for people to walk over. Well," she sat up very straight and tossed her head, "I can't help it, — they will have to, that 's all. Perhaps *you* think I 've been enjoying myself these few weeks," looking quite fiercely

at me. But I did n't say a word, — she would n't have let me, anyhow; she was talking so fast. "Well, I can tell you that I have been wretched, perfectly *wretched!* Very likely I shall have more wretched times — when Nurse takes me in hand; but at any rate I 'll have some fun, too, between whiles. I am going to play tennis and golf, and to row and swim and all that, just as I used to; in fact, I 'm going to be my natural self — I might just as soon be dead as that miserable poke of the last few weeks. If you *knew* how hard it has been to keep up that stiff, old fossilised manner! Ugh!" She raised her hands with a gesture of disgust. "I know it was no more like Nan than I 'm like Miss Marston. I felt all the time as if I were in a nightmare. I could n't laugh, I could n't talk or have the least fun — for fear I should lose my grand dignity! Now, Jack," very earnestly, "I may have to take care of the family for the next fifty years, — you know I am never going to marry, — and I 'm certain I could n't keep that primness up all my life, — I simply *could n't.* Why, I should go insane! That conviction came to me a few minutes ago, and I made up my mind then and there that I would drop the whole farce, and just be my own natural self, — good, bad, or indifferent, but Betty Rose. There, now!" She rushed all this out with a tremendous air of determination, bringing her foot down hard on the floor several times to emphasise her statements.

"I 'm thankful to hear it," I put in quickly, as she stopped to take a breath. "Now, just drop some of those old 'duties' as well; then —"

"Oh, but, Jack — I could n't do *that!*" she exclaimed, in such a shocked tone that I almost felt as if I had suggested something dreadful. "Those I *must* fulfil — Nannie always did them. 'T is n't the doing that bothers me, it 's the remembering of them. I declare those duties are the bane of my existence! They pursue me all day long, — like the bottle-imp in the German legend Fee told us the other day,

— I go to sleep with them on my mind, *dream* of them, and they are the first thing I think of in the morning as I wake. See here," she pulled a long, folded paper, which looked much the worse for wear, out of the sleeve of her shirt waist, and poked it at me, "I even made a list of them, and I have studied the old thing until you would think I ought to know it by heart. But I don't; there is n't a day but what I forget some — "

"Well, what if you do? — you are not a slave that 's bound to do just so much each day!" I interrupted impatiently. "Could n't we get in somebody to help Hannah, so that you would n't have such a lot? I 'll speak to Fee — "

"Indeed, you will not," Betty declared. "If I want another servant I can speak for myself;" adding in a milder tone, "I 'm only bothered because it is all so new. I shall get used to it by and by. Cheer up, Mr. John Minot Rose! And Miss Elizabeth Rose, likewise!" She sprang up from the lounge suddenly, and, catching me by the shoulders, whirled me round that room so fast that I got fairly dizzy. I tell you, she 's strong! "There! That has done me good — I feel more like myself already," she cried, holding on to the side of the door, breathless and laughing. "Oh, Jack, you are the stiffest creature to haul around! Now don't you ever say 'austere' to me! Ta-ta!" with an airy wave of her fingers. "I — will — meet — thee — not at Philippi, like Cæsar's ghost, but — at dinner-time." And with a merry laugh she ran off to her own room.

She came down to dinner in a white gown, looking as gay as a lark, and was just as full of fun and good spirits! That was the pleasantest evening we 'd had since Nan's wedding. I should n't wonder if the others felt as I did, — as if a cloud had been lifted off us.

Well, after that there was no more of the "austere" dignity; and that made a big difference in the house. But though Betty was jolly and merry, and all that, I could see

she was n't quite as headlong as she used to be; and I know she tried awfully hard to control that quick temper of hers. I 've always thought a great deal of Betty, and liked to have her around; but these days I got another feeling for her as well — of real respect — as I saw how bravely and cheerfully she tackled everything. And she had her hands full sometimes, I can tell you.

It seems to me as if, with three servants in the house, there should n't be so very much for Betty to see to. But there really is. Cook is one of the people that will do only just what they choose to, — beside getting meals; since Nora 's gone, Nurse does the sewing for the younger ones, and she is forever telling Betty that " what with the rampagin' of them children 't was as much as any livin' person with one pair of hands could do to keep 'em decent an' mended up." Which we know means " You need n't expect me to do any more 'n I 'm doin'." And Hannah appears to be always up to her ears in work. Besides this, now that they knew she was n't ill or " pining " for Nannie, Cook and Nurse very often made themselves mighty disagreeable, — they seemed to resent receiving orders from Betty. So altogether, as I have said before, she had her hands pretty full.

I tried to help her by making notes for papa when Fee was in town, — I get so nervous over it that papa must think me a perfect fool! — and I kept the children out on the beach as much as I could, so they should n't bother her. And that was about all I could do.

But one day it suddenly came to me, " Why should n't Kathie help Betty? " So I spoke to her about it right away, and when she said certainly she would, and seemed delighted with the idea, I thought I 'd done a big thing.

Betty was willing; so Kathie began at once. Well, to the surprise of everybody, if she did n't turn out a regular little housewife! She seemed to know just how to take hold, and the quiet way she worked reminded us of Nan. Betty was

very glad to have her help, and for a while everything went along fine, until Miss Kathie must needs upset it.

Kathie is a nice, gentle, obliging girl, and she 's very pretty, but she *has* got two serious faults, — she is obstinate and she is officious. She is kind-hearted and, as Phil says, she is so anxious to be helpful to people that sometimes she makes herself a perfect nuisance. That 's what she did with Betty, — instead of sticking to what had been given her to do, she must needs go on and try to take the whole housekeeping on her shoulders. *I* think Nurse was at the bottom of it. You see Kathie is one of her pets, and she was so tickled over the smartness of her " lamb " — that 's Kathie — that she just urged her on.

Of course, Betty would n't stand that, and the consequence was we had lots of little fusses in the family. Mädel and I *knew* Betty was right, and we always stuck up for her; but Judge, Alan, and Nurse used to act as if they thought Kathie was very much abused. If Betty corrected her for these interferences — and she was really very mild, knowing what a cry-baby she had to deal with — Kathie would weep until her eyes were a sight, and go about with the most woe-begone expression. Then Nurse would get indignant, and make *her*self very disagreeable. And yet the very next time an opportunity came right ahead would go Miss Kathie and do some more interfering.

And one of these interferences caused a big quarrel one day.

I know that Betty was as much to blame as Kathie that morning, and I am awfully sorry she got in such a temper; but I 'm positive she never would have done it if it was n't that all those other fusses had broken down her patience.

'T was a Thursday; and what Hannah calls " particular company " was expected from the city for lunch. Phil and Felix were coming down by a morning train, and with them Professor Keene, a gentleman papa had met at the Black-

woods' ball, and one he thought a great deal of, because he had written some very deep, dry book about the Nile. Generally papa never bothers himself about what we 're to have for any meal, but to-day he asked Betty to be sure and have a nice lunch.

He drove Pegasus down to the station to meet Professor Keene and the boys; and Betty set the table herself, — the girls always do on any special occasion.

I thought it looked fine, — with all the pretty things on it and flowers. Then Betty remembered something which must be got from the village, so I harnessed G. W. L. Spry to the cart, and off she and I started.

We were n't gone long, and on our return I dropped her at the gate and drove right round to the stable. Everything was quiet in the house then, but it was n't when I came up the piazza steps a little later. There is a square hall between the dining-room and drawing-room which is fitted up with a table, chairs, and an old lounge, and here the family sit on a rainy day to read or sew. Some of them were in there now, and there was a rumpus going on. Kathie sat by the table, her light curls falling very gracefully round her shoulders, the corners of her mouth drawn down, on the verge of tears, and the picture of injured innocence. On the other side of the table was Mädel, with an expression of frightened amazement on her little face, staring up at Betty, who stood in the middle of the floor laying down the law to Kathie for all she was worth; while those two impudent young monkeys, Paul and Alan, balanced themselves over the window-sill, — their heels outside, their heads and shoulders in the room, — making impertinent remarks, and giggling.

It seems that after Betty 'd gone Kathie discovered some goldenrod in bloom in the garden. What did she do but take all the blossoms off the lunch-table that Betty had put there, and the centre-piece, or whatever it 's called, — in

fact, change everything to suit herself, substituting the flowers she had found!

Well, Betty was raving! The table *did* look prettier than before, but it was the way Kathie had done it that provoked her. "You are a most daring, rude girl!" she stormed. "And if you ever attempt such a thing again I shall take you straight to papa. Now that Nannie is not here, *I* am the mistress of this house, and I wish you to remember it!" shaking her long forefinger at Kathie,—Betty was so angry she could hardly control her voice.

> "*I* am the ruler of the Queen's na*vee!*
> . . . . . .
> I polished up the handle of the big front door,
> I polished it so carefull*ee*
> That now I 'm the ruler of the Queen's na*vee!*"

sang Judge, from the window-sill, Alan coming in on the last line.

Betty made a dash, but of course she did n't catch 'em. And standing at a safe distance they shouted the lines, bowing to her, and throwing kisses in the most exasperating way.

That provoked Betty all the more, and she began to say some pretty sharp things. I tried my best to cool her down, but she would n't even listen; and there was Kathie mopping her eyes and hanging on to the last word in that tearful, obstinate fashion of hers. I was in deadly fear lest Nurse should appear on the scene; I knew that would make matters worse, all round.

"What did you do with those flowers?" demanded Betty, imperiously. "I have the greatest mind to make you change everything back to what it was at first. You are entirely too officious. And you are dreadfully *conceited* too. That is just how this trouble has come,—you thought you would show every one how *much* better taste you have in arranging a table than I."



"'*I* am the mistress of this house, and I wish you to remember it!'"



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Well, that was the last straw, that broke poor Kathie all up. "Oh, Betty! I *did n't!* How *can* you say that!" she wailed. "I never thought of such a thing. You — said — the other d-day," she was sobbing so hard she could hardly get the words out — "that goldenrod — would — look lovely on — a — lunch-table. And — when — I — I — found these, I just — thought — I 'd — sur-r-prise you. I *did n't* d-do — it because I was — con-ceited. I — know where I threw — those other — f-flowers. I 'll g-get them — and put — them back." With her handkerchief to her eyes, she started for the door. But Betty flew at her and, catching her by the arm, whirled her round, and set her down so hard on a chair that she actually bounced up. "You shall do nothing of the kind, — you sha'n't touch that table," she commanded. "You know very well there is n't time."

Now, we pitch into one another pretty lively sometimes with words, but none of us — not even we boys — ever strike one another in anger. Of course, we have our tussles and wrestlings now and then, but not in anger, — just as soon as anybody begins to get mad, then it 's time to quit such sport. That is papa's rule, and I believe in it. And ever since that time that Felix got hurt, Nan has been extra particular with the children. So I was surprised and *awfully* sorry when Betty did this, and I guess all the others felt so, too, for in about one minute there was a general uproar. Mädel howled and flew to throw herself on Kathie; the boys fell into the room with a yell; and rushing to Betty, I caught her hand away from Kathie's shoulder. "Betty!" I cried sharply, "what 're you doing?"

Kathie was the only one who kept cool. Instead of being alarmed she looked round at us with an indignant air, — a tear or two still hanging on her long eyelashes. "You need n't all fly at us like that," she said, in that little superior manner she has caught from Nora. "Do you suppose Betty is going to *strike* me?"

That settled Betty! She gave Kathie one look, tried to say something, but not a word came; then, throwing her hands up over her face, she dashed out of the room.

I waited a few minutes, — I felt she 'd want them to be alone, — then I followed, where I knew I would find her, — in the little latticed summer-house at the foot of the garden. She had her head on the rustic table, crying bitterly; but when I went in she looked up. "Oh, Jack! I am so ashamed!" she said. "To get so furious over such a *small* thing — and to take hold of Kathie in anger! What *will* Nannie say when she hears — I don't think she has ever laid an angry finger on one of us. And I know I must have tried her awfully. And now *I* can't control my temper. I hope the boys won't follow my example, — how could I correct them for what I do myself? Oh! I 'm not *fit* to take charge of the home. I feel so low — so ashamed, so degraded!"

I understood that feeling, — I get it every time after I 've been mad and cooled down.

"I know," I said briefly; then presently I added, "Kathie is entirely too officious."

Betty's face got red, and she looked up at me in such a shamed way. "Jack," she whispered, "'t was n't only that — I — I — think now that I was angry as much — because she showed more taste than I! Her table *did* look prettier. Is it any wonder I feel low — and *mean?*" Her lips began quivering, and the tears were rolling fast down her cheeks. "Jealous of my own little sister! Oh, Jack," she went on, covering her eyes with her hands, "I pray *so* earnestly for God to help me, — to give me wisdom and patience and every other quality that He knows will make me as good a sister to you all as Nannie has been. And this is the way I act — oh!"

Somehow I can't stand seeing Betty cry, — she is usually so bright and merry, — it just upsets me. "I wish we were

all as brave and honest as you are," I said heartily. I put my arm over her shoulder and gave her a squeeze. "I 'm just as sorry this happened as you are, Betty," I said softly; "and I should n't wonder if Kathie were too. But don't you get discouraged, — keep on asking for help, you 'll get it. It 'll come, I 'm sure it will." I think she felt a little better after that.

"I 'll come in presently," she said, after a while, "and speak to Kathie. I ought to — "

I nodded — I knew what she meant — and gave her a kiss; then, marching around the house to the front, I hunted up Miss Kathie, and interviewed *her* in a quiet corner of the piazza.

I did n't say a great deal, — you know there 's no use in rubbing a thing in too hard, and I do hate to be disagreeable. Besides, there was n't any need of it, for Kathie was very willing to own that Betty was n't the only one to blame in the matter. Of course, she shed a few tears, — Kathie has some nice ways about her, but she *is* the most "weepy" person! And then, all at once, while I was still talking to her, away she darted down the piazza steps and along the garden path to the summer-house. I saw her fall on Betty's neck, and their arms go around each other; then a shout from Judge made me wheel round, and face the other way.

"They 're coming!" he cried, waving his cap to me as he ran up the walk. "Papa and the gentleman are talking two-forty, and Pegasus has got it all his own way, — he 's just crawling. Fee is in the back seat, but Phil 's walking, — he could n't stand Peggie's funereal pace. Where 's Betty? Phil says papa wants lunch *instanter!*"

The next afternoon Betty was sitting on the top step of the piazza arranging some flowers for the drawing-room, when Hilliard Erveng came walking up the gravel path and

stood before her. "It is n't August, but I could not stay away," he said, holding out his hand.

Betty had been pretty sober all day, but not "austere," and very gentle with everybody; while Kathie followed her about from place to place, and waited on her like a little slave. I guess it will be a good while before either of 'em forgets that fuss.

Well, Betty *was* surprised to see Hilliard. She gave a great start, and her face got, first white, then red, — the colour settled itself in pretty pink spots on her cheeks, and an expression flashed into her eyes that fairly astonished me. But down went the lids over them; and she shook hands with the coolest "Oh, good afternoon!" that you can imagine — as if she had seen him the day before. I was n't sorry she treated him that way! Hilliard is a good enough sort of fellow, though he is awfully "slow;" but I could n't see any reason in his coming all the way from Boston just to tell Betty he could n't stay away. It seemed to me a very senseless piece of business, and I was very stiff to him. But Felix and papa — Phil had gone back to the city — were very cordial, and nothing would do but he must stay and dine with us. I think he was only too glad to accept.

After dinner we sat on the piazza, and really, if Betty so much as stirred, Hilliard was on the alert. The others did n't seem to notice it, but I did, and I stayed just as close by Betty as I could. I did n't want to be disagreeable, but I remembered that Englishman, Warwick; and, anyway, a fellow 's got *some* claim on his sister. Hilliard said he must go back to town by the 10.30 train, and the evening was slipping away all right, when what did he do — I think 't was cheeky of him! — but ask Betty, right before us all, if she 'd take a stroll on the beach with him. 'T is n't that the beach is far away, — it is right close by the house, — but what had he to say to Betty that we could n't hear? I did n't like that at all.

Betty hesitated, and I spoke up: "It's pretty damp down there sometimes, and you were too hoarse to sing this morning, Betty."

Fee laughed, and peered at me in the half dark of the piazza. "It must have been some song you wanted, Rosebud, — your tone suggests a grievance," he said. And papa put in: "I don't think it would hurt you to take a few turns with Hilliard, my dear. But put something round your shoulders."

Well, of course, after that I could n't say any more, and off started Hilliard and Betty. But I went to the end of the piazza and sat on the railing, so I could keep an eye on them. They saw me, — Betty waved her hand to me. For a while they walked up and down, up and down, — I should think they would have got tired, — and it seemed to me that Hilliard was doing a tremendous lot of talking for such a quiet person. Presently they sat down on a rock, and there they stayed for the longest time.

I was getting so sleepy! Fee was very quiet, lying back in his chair, and I 'm pretty sure papa was napping, when those two came up the piazza steps. I was to drive Hilliard to the station, and there was n't any too much time to do it in, — Pegasus *will* not be hurried. Hilliard was bidding good-bye, and as I sat waiting for him in the depot-wagon I saw him take Betty's two hands in his — she was standing on the lowest step, away from the others — and hold them on his breast; then he kissed them!

Oh, how *mad* I was! I felt like shying one of the cushions at him!

I suppose he thought I was very gruff and unmannerly all the way, but I did n't care a rap; I was so provoked I did n't care what he thought. Fee let me in when I got back, and he said everybody was in bed; but I had seen a light in Betty's room as I came along; and after I told him good-night I ran upstairs and tapped on her door.

"It's I — Jack," I called softly, and she immediately answered to come in.

It was after eleven o'clock, but Betty was still dressed, and, what was more, she was leaning out of the window as unconcernedly as if the evening had just begun. "Come over here, Jack, and look at the stars," she said, making room for me on the window-seat. "They are perfectly lovely to-night." But she did n't turn her face to me.

"Betty," I said determinedly, going up to her, "*what* brought Hilliard Erveng here to-night all the way from Boston? What does he want here?"

There was a little silence, then Betty looked round at me. "I — well, Jack — I — I — think he wants — me!" she answered, in such a slow, shy way you would hardly have known it was Betty; the colour was all out of her cheeks, she was pale, and her eyes looked big and wistful.

Though I had suspected this, it made me very angry to hear it.

"Wants you!" I cried. "Well, I admire his cheek! He is n't going to have you! You know very well, Betty, you said you would never marry, — that you 'd be an old maid, and just stay with us always. I hope you told him so, and sent him about his business?" When a person tells you a thing *positively*, why, naturally you expect that they mean it. But I 'll have my doubts after this. "I hope you settled him?" I repeated, when she did n't answer right away.

"I did tell him, Jack," she said slowly. "I told him ever so many times. But he is *so* persistent," — a little pleased smile came round her mouth, and, mind you, I 've heard her make fun of him scores of times for that very thing! — "he — he *would n't* take no for an answer. So —"

"Oh, Betty," I broke out sharply, "you are never going to marry that fellow and leave us all alone!"

Betty's lip quivered, and she put out her hand quickly as if to silence me. "I told him *just* how everything was,"

she said, in that slow, quiet voice that was n't a bit like her, "and that I could not — would not — leave — you all. He said, why could n't Kathie take my place by and by? — and — I told him Kathie was too young to have the responsibility of the house put on her. Then he said he would wait — twice seven years for me, if it were necessary."

"And you took him, *after all?*" I exclaimed indignantly.

Betty shook her head. "There was neither taking nor giving," she answered drearily. Then she smiled, — a brave little smile that made me feel very mean and uncomfortable. "You need n't worry about it, Jack," she said. "I shall stay right here with you all, as I promised. Hilliard would not take no for an answer, — though I told him plainly that I could never marry him as long as I was needed here, — but I can't help it if he is persistent."

"I saw the way he bid you good-night," I remarked presently, "and — I thought perhaps — "

Betty looked down at her hands, lying in her lap; then she held them up close to her in a "cuddly" sort of way, but I don't think she knew she was doing it. "Yes," she said, "that was good-bye; I felt so sorry for him I let him do that."

"Betty," I said suddenly, "perhaps it will all come right. In a — year or two" — I had a struggle to get that out — "Kathie *may* be able to see to things. Then — well, then you could take Hilliard — if — you still wanted to. I suppose you think I 'm an awfully selfish beast," I went on — I felt so *mean*, "but — Nora is gone, Nan is gone — and it seems as if I *could n't* let you leave us too. But I 'll try not to feel that way. So perhaps it will all come right. I guess I had better go now. Good-night."

Betty pulled me down to her and kissed me in such a quiet, womanly way!

"Had n't you better go to bed? It 's long after eleven," I reminded her, lingering by the door.

"I will presently," she said; "I want to look at the stars a little longer. They have been such a comfort to-night — they seem so near — and I got a feeling that mamma was there, looking down on me through them. How different everything might have been for us, Jack, if she had lived!"

I walked straight back to Betty's side, and, putting my arms round her, kissed her two or three times. "Don't get discouraged, — cheer up!" I said earnestly. "You see if it does n't all come right. I shall miss you, Betty — *awfully;* but I — I hope — it will all come right." Then I went off to my own room, but I can tell you I was n't happy.

XIX.

QUIT YE LIKE MEN.

TOLD BY JACK.

AS I was coming downstairs one morning Betty put her head inside the front door and called, "Come out on the piazza, Jack, — breakfast won't be ready for some minutes yet." When I got out and dropped down beside her on the piazza step, she said abruptly: "Have you noticed Fee lately? *I* think something is worrying him."

Now, this summer Fee and I have been together a good deal, on account of Phil's being in town every day. I 've helped him dress and undress, gone about the beach with him, and done for him whatever he would let me do; for Fee is a very independent person, — Phil will let you do twice as much waiting on him. And as I had told Betty several times, it seemed to me that Fee was stronger on his feet this summer than for years, — I had n't noticed that he appeared to be worried. Still, for the last few weeks I had been so busy thinking of Betty and — in a way — looking after her, that I remembered now I had n't noticed Fee's moods very much. And you have got to do that to know when anything ails him, — he won't come right out and tell it the way the rest of us do.

You see, when I came to think the matter over, I felt as if I 'd been mean to Betty that night — about Hilliard — and I have been trying to make up to her for it ever since. I did n't know how she would act, — I mean if she 'd mope or go round looking sad and dejected. But she did n't do either; she just kept on pretty much the same as usual — having her

little "tilts," as she calls 'em, with Nurse and Cook, trying to be patient with the younger ones, and struggling with the housekeeping, — trying to do her level best all round. Every week she falls into an agony over the balancing of her accounts, though Fee always helps her. She 'll get so tearing mad sometimes that she sends the book whizzing across the room, and she simply *abuses* the man that invented arithmetic. But after she has let off steam that way she goes at the accounts again, and sticks at them until everything 's clear.

I told you I was getting to "respect" Betty — well, all these are the things that are making me do it — I do *admire* a girl that 's got lots of pluck and "go" in her!

Now and then Betty would go off for a walk by herself, and come home with that wistful look in her eyes; but usually she was just as cheerful as ever. She talks to me about Hilliard sometimes — it seems he declared that night that he would speak to papa in August, but she would not allow that. "I told him there had been enough weddings lately to last us a good while," she confided to me, "and that I would n't have anything said about it. I told him I could n't *think* of leaving home for a long, long, *long* time. In fact, Jack, I said the most *dis*couraging things. But, do you know," here a little smile would curl up the corner of her mouth, "I feel as if I had made no impression at all on him, — I think he expects it will all come right yet;" then she would look up appealingly at me.

I knew what she wanted me to say, and generally I 'd come in with, "It will, Betty. You see if the whole business does n't turn out right by and by!"

The next minute I 'd hear her trilling out some snatch of a song as she went about her "duties."

Well, all this had taken my attention from Fee; so when Betty said that about his "worrying," I was taken considerably aback. "No, I have n't noticed. What makes you think so?" I asked eagerly.

"Well —" Betty deliberated — "he looked very sober last Saturday when he came down — and he was as cross as two sticks while we were 'casting up our accounts,'" she made a face, — "he called me 'a dummy!' And you know, Jack, whenever Fee begins to worry he *always* gets irritable, — we 've all noticed that. He had n't been in the house five minutes, yesterday afternoon, when he flew out at Judge; and there he is on the beach now, — he has been sitting on that rock for the last half hour, staring at the water. If Nan were here he would tell her if anything were troubling him, but he would n't open his mouth to me about it for a kingdom." She sighed.

"Fee is n't one of the confiding kind, you know, Betty," I reminded her. "And he won't stand any asking; so I don't see anything else to do but to wait till he chooses to tell." All the same, though, I kept an eye on him, and I very soon saw that Betty was right, — something *was* troubling him.

Fee has done *well* since he started in with that Jermyn-Duff lawsuit, and lately he had been working up another case for a Mr. Headley. It was the largest and most important he 'd had. Max said it was a great compliment to Fee having it put in his hands; and to win it would mean reputation as well as a big round sum of money. Of course Fee was pleased — we all were — and he had been working steadily at the case for weeks, getting things into shape for the trial, which was to come off early in September. And now I wondered if some disagreeable witness had turned up; or if he was feeling the strain of the responsibility of the case, — the remembrance of that nervous breakdown over his first "defence" always comes back to me when he 's working on a case; though he has been wonderfully well lately.

He was awfully cranky that day, — seemed as if nothing suited him, — and, as Betty said, "the way he kept Judge

and Alan in order gave her a holiday." But for that sort of thing to last a whole day was n't like Fee. No matter how cross he is, usually there 's a let up every now and then, when he is so nice and pleasant and jolly that one forgets the disagreeableness; but this day it was straight through.

And somebody else noticed it besides us, for after dinner papa said to him, looking steadily at Felix through his glasses, "My son, is anything troubling you?"

There was a dead silence; then Fee answered slowly, "Yes, sir; and if you will allow me, I should like to tell you of it."

Papa, Fee, and I were the only ones on the piazza that afternoon; we were at the end overlooking the water; and, of course, when he said this I got up to go away. But looking over his shoulder at me, Fee remarked, "You need n't go, Jack. Only, keep what you hear to yourself."

So I sat down again.

"Is it something connected with your profession?" papa asked kindly, when Fee did n't begin right away.

Two round spots of red came out suddenly on Fee's cheeks. "Father," he broke out vehemently, bringing his fist down on his knee, "that fellow Headley is a rascal,— he is trying to use me for his own infamous ends!"

Papa was so astonished that he sat up straight, holding on to the arms of his chair. "Headley!" he exclaimed. "Why, he is a man of the strictest integrity. Be careful how you make such statements, Felix."

Fee shook his head. "*I* used to think so, too, until the last few days; but I know what I 'm saying." There was a little nervous catch in his voice, but he looked papa in the eye. "You know how pleased and proud I was to get this case," he went on rapidly. "I 've thrown all my energies into it, and as far as I could see there was no doubt I should win it. I have wondered more than once

that Headley had n't put the affair in the hands of Max, or Vick & Stone, or some other big firm. Now, I know why he did it," the veins swelled out on Fee's forehead, and his voice got fierce; "he thought I was so young and inexperienced that he would make a tool of me, and work me for his own ends. But he sha'n't!" He struck his knee again. "I 'm not the fool he took me for — Father, that case is *fraudulent!* it has n't an honest leg to stand on." Fee was all worked up; his voice trembled, and the hand lying on his knee kept opening and shutting nervously. "Headley misrepresented certain things to me, — I only got an idea of the truth last Saturday, — you may be sure I followed up that track. And yesterday I taxed him with it. He tried to squirm out of it, — in that bland, suave way of his, — but I felt his insincerity, — I knew he was lying to me — "

Papa leaned forward and laid his hand on Fee's shoulder. "Stop, and compose yourself, my boy," he said kindly, "then we can talk the matter over quietly."

Felix nodded; and catching hold of the piazza railing got on his feet, and stood for a while with his back to us, looking over the water. That gave him time to pull himself together, for when he came back and took his seat he had an entirely different expression on his face.

"Excuse my getting so excited, sir," he said to papa; "I 've been boiling up ever since Saturday — " He broke off abruptly and drew some papers from his pocket. "Now, I will explain the present complication," he added. And this he proceeded to do, in a clear, cool, calm way that showed he knew what he was about. Some evidence that had come up threw a very black light over the case; and as Felix went on, I, too, began to "boil;" even papa got quite upset.

Before Fee could finish his explanation papa was saying, "Give it up immediately, Felix." "Let us be thankful

this was discovered in time." "Sever all dealings with that man at once!" and his tone was most decided too.

"He wouldn't admit one of my charges in so many words," continued Fee, "but his conduct was a tacit acknowledgment of their truth. Under the pretence of not wishing to change lawyers, he made me a larger offer to carry the case through. And when I refused, he insinuated that he could spoil my whole career if he chose to. He will be ugly, sir; I must make up my mind to that."

Papa looked uneasy. "I wish Derwent were here," he said.

"I've written him a full account of it," answered Felix, "though, of course, the matter will be settled long before he gets back. And I have talked every detail over with Saunders and with Peck. I know Max thinks a good deal of their opinion. They agree with me that things look foxy, and advise me to drop everything and get out as quick as I can. I told Headley yesterday I would take no further steps in the case; but Saunders advises that I should make a formal resignation — in writing. And now that I've talked it over with you, sir, I will do it."

"By all means," assented papa.

There was a little silence after that. Fee's wrath had died down; he sat resting his head on his hand, looking sad and dejected. I felt *so* sorry! I knew what a sharp disappointment this was to him.

"I wonder why these things happen?" he said presently; there was a dreary note in his voice. "Why should matters have taken this turn? Why shouldn't it have been that everything was right, and that I carried the case through successfully? All these weeks of labour for nothing! And it meant so much to me to win it — ! Such opportunities don't come often in a lifetime. It's *hard!*"

Papa glanced at him. "My son," he said gently, "a clear conscience is of more value than wealth or fame;" and something in the way he said it made Fee's face



"He sat resting his head on his hand."



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brighten. But papa's eyes had wandered away, over the waters to the far-off edge of the horizon. "An Almighty Hand guides us, a loving Father doeth all things well," he murmured. "'Now we see through a glass darkly, but then — face to face.' We must trust Him."

Without a word Felix leaned forward, holding out his hand; without a word papa took it in his, and they shook hands warmly.

A big lump jumped into my throat, and it was a relief to have Betty and the children come up the walk laughing and talking.

It was the next day that Alice came down. We had n't expected her until the following week, and we were all delighted. I *like* Alice; she 's a nice person to have in the house. If you had heard the shout when we saw her walking up the gravel path with Phil!

Betty gave a little scream and flew at her; the children yelled. Major barked, I don't know what I did; and papa was so pleased that he actually kissed Alice! Fee said not a word; but I saw his face — and Alice's! As to Phil! as Judge said, "he beamed on everybody as if he 'd got the earth." And we had a jolly evening, — what we are beginning now to call an "old-time" evening, — singing and playing, and lots of fun!

While we were in the midst of it, enjoying ourselves immensely, Hannah came in to tell papa a boy was outside from the village, with a telegram for him. When any member of the family is away and an unexpected telegram comes, I think it always gives a person a nervous feeling until the contents are read. Though no one said a word, I 'm pretty sure we all thought of Nannie and Nora when that yellow envelope was handed in, before it was opened — Betty said she held her breath!

Well, it was n't about our girls, thank goodness! though it brought sad news. Aunt Lindsay had died suddenly, and

papa was telegraphed for, to come right on to Boston. Though we 've heard of aunt Lindsay ever since we were born, none of us knew her very well ; — I had only seen her twice in my life, — so we could n't feel *very* badly. But papa did. He used to stay at her house when he was a boy and a young man — aunt Lindsay always called him " Jack " ! — and she was *very* fond of mamma. She had no relatives at all, and had lived for years and years, with her maid, in a big, gloomy old house — Phil has been there — in Boston.

Of course, after the telegram came there was a grand hurry until papa got off, — Phil going up to town with him.

The next morning I went to the city with Felix, leaving him at his office, where Phil always met him. And three days later the boys came down again together, to stay over Saturday and Sunday as usual. By this time we had heard from papa, — just a line or two announcing his safe arrival and that he would be home as soon as possible, but could not say when. And until Phil and Fee came I looked after the family.

We were all sitting on the piazza when those two came along, Felix leaning on Phil's arm. And I noticed at once that Fee looked worn and tired. He had given up the case of his own free will, and he was *glad* he 'd done it ; but all the same he felt awfully dejected over the loss, — and it came out afterwards that he had had a row with Headley that day ! Phil was the picture of health, and he had news too.

" I 'm off for Chicago in ten days' time ! " he shouted before he got to the piazza steps. " You will only have my delightful society for a little while longer ; so make the most of it, and be just as nice and kind — " He said this to all, but he looked at Alice with what Alan calls " big eyes."

Well, that put a damper on us. We had known all along — since before Nonie's wedding — that Phil would have to go and live in Chicago ; but it seemed like a new thing when he told us the date was actually set and so near. As Betty

said, it was perfectly disgusting the way the family was dwindling down.

But Phil appeared in the best of spirits, and he hovered about Alice the whole time.

Alice was very nice to him; she sang and played for him, and was always willing to talk with him or walk on the beach. But I had a feeling, a conviction, deep down in my heart, that she did n't care at all for him — in the way he did for her. And I thought I knew why.

But Phil seemed to have no misgivings; he was just as full of fun and nonsense as he could stick, keeping us in a roar of laughter with his funny speeches. Fee was very sober; and we all noticed how he and Phil kept together, — when Phil was not dancing attendance on Alice. This would be their first separation, and I think both dreaded it; Fee especially, for he depended so on Phil's strength, — though more than once Phil has said that he was the greater gainer from their companionship. And we all know that Fee's opinion has a tremendous amount of weight with him.

Phil spent Saturday with us, — "dawdling," as he termed it, around the house, in the hammocks, on the beach, romping with the children, teasing Betty, and yet managing to spend a good deal of time with Alice. Toward afternoon he came up to our room and dressed himself carefully. He put on his new suit of clothes, and tried on all his neckties before he settled on one to wear. And I can't tell you how many times he brushed his hair. Then he stood before the mirror and looked critically at himself; he took a side view, pulled down his coat, swelled out his chest, settled his coat collar into place, and patted and pulled at his vest. "How do I look, Rosebud?" he asked, craning his neck to get a sight of his back.

"Oh, you 'll pass in a crowd," I answered with a grin. I was sitting on the window-sill swinging my legs and watching him.

He fidgeted round the room for a few minutes, taking up and putting down things; finally he stopped near me, and with such a funny, sheepish expression that I could scarcely keep a straight face, he asked: "Tell me, Jack — now honestly — do you think — would *you* say that — er — I was the sort of fellow — a girl would care for?" Such hesitation was very unusual; and he stood eyeing me anxiously.

Phil is handsome, we all know that; and he is so kind and pleasant, besides, that no one could help liking him. But I was sure it was n't "liking" that he had in his mind, and I did n't know how to answer him without, perhaps, hurting his feelings. "How can *I* tell what girls like?" I said. "You should ask Betty;" then I added, "I guess you 're all right."

Phil grinned, and putting his hand on his heart made me a low bow. "Thanks awfully, most gracious and eloquent youth," he remarked. "Compliments roll as smoothly off your tongue as water off a duck's back." Then he sauntered out to Fee's room. "Ready for an audience, old chappie?" he asked, sticking his head inside the door; "or has the Law got you in its clutches?"

Felix's answer was prompt and hearty, "Come in, Philippus, come in, of course;" so Phil walked in and shut the door behind him.

There was nothing special to do, so I stayed there on the window-sill for a while, whistling to myself. I was thinking out a story that had come into my head that afternoon, and if it amounted to any good I thought I 'd send it to the editors in Boston that had accepted the "Lark." I was just going over the beginning, — sort of arranging it, in my mind, for sometimes the beginning bothers me, — when Fee's door went open with a bang, and I heard Phil say in a low voice, as if he were trying to restrain himself, but I could tell he was very angry, —

"Why? — *why?* — give a *reason* for your refusal."

"I *cannot* do what you ask, Phil. And you must trust me for the reason," Felix answered; when Fee gives a decision in that cold, quiet tone, you may know the matter 's settled, — no one can budge him from it.

Phil knows this as well as anybody; but that did n't prevent his making some more remarks. "I can't understand the way you people act about this," he went on, getting quite excited. "She 's such a *lovely* girl, and the whole family act so wild over her that I should think they 'd all be willing to do whatever they could, to bring it about."

I got off the window-sill, and hurried out to them; Phil had raised his voice and I was so afraid Alice would hear, — her room was n't far away. "Look out, Phil," I reminded him, "the girls will hear you."

He glared at me and went right on, though he did lower his voice.

"But, no, precious little encouragement have I got from anybody — except Nonie. Nannie poured cold water on my hopes whenever she could, and now *you* refuse to even say a *word* for me — " He finished abruptly.

"There are very few things I would n't do for you, Phil, and you know that," Felix said earnestly. "But I *can't* do this. I can't go to her and — plead your cause — ask her to marry you. You must do that for yourself." Then suddenly he turned on Phil: "Don't you *know* all you 've got in your favour?" he cried sharply. "Do you suppose that if I were like you, in full health and strength, able to protect and take care of a woman, *I* would ask anybody to plead for me?" He limped over to the window, and stood there with his back to us.

I heard the sharp pain in his voice; it brought back to me that night of the fire; and I thought surely Phil would catch on to it too. But he did n't — Betty says I 'm dense; well, I think Phil is, for I *know* he never understood how things were until — But you 'll hear about that later on.

"Then you won't do it?" questioned Phil; there was a lurking hope in his tone yet.

"I've told you — I cannot — I will not," Fee answered; then looking over his shoulder at Phil, he added slowly, but very kindly: "In choosing you, Philippus, she will do — well —"

"Ah! bosh!" interrupted Phil, savagely, "talk is cheap!" Flinging himself past me, he caught up his hat from our room and strode down the hall and out of the house.

But he seemed to have got back his good humour by the time he came in, for all through dinner, and afterward, when we sat on the piazza, he kept us laughing with his funny speeches. He had a bright colour, and he talked a good deal; I think he was nervous, though.

By and by the younger ones went up to bed; then Betty disappeared — to attend to some forgotten "duty." She had hardly gone when Felix got on his feet, and started to go down the steps. "Come on and give me an arm, Jack," he called. "I want some exercise." But instead of keeping to the path — that is usually his "constitutional" — he went down by the gate.

He was very restless, and kept walking backward and forward, backward and forward, until I was afraid he'd tire himself out.

"No, I won't," he said decidedly, when I suggested this. "I'll stop before that."

Well, I don't know how long we were there — seemed to me a pretty good while — when footsteps came crunching rapidly along the gravel path, and Phil passed us. He was making for the gate as fast as he could go, in a reckless kind of way that struck us at once.

"Hullo!" I sung out, to let him know we were there; and Fee started forward.

"Are you off, old fellow? Where to? Where are you going?" he called.

"To the devil!" flung back Phil, hoarsely; the next instant the gate slammed violently, and he was off.

"That lies by way of the station," Fee said, as the sound of Phil's tramp, tramp, died away. "There 's an eight something train for New York!"

"Will you go after him?" I asked eagerly.

Felix shook his head. "He is a man now, he would n't permit it," he said wearily. He was shaking from head to foot with nervousness, and he let me help him to a rock near by, where he sat for ever so long, without a word.

I did n't say anything either — I was busy thinking. I felt sorry for Phil, but I was provoked too. What need was there for him to go and be refused by Alice! If he 'd had any eyes in his head he might have seen she did n't care for him in the way he wanted. But that 's the trouble with Phil, — he can't see a thing till it is fairly *shoved* on him. Now he had gone off to the city, hurt and raving mad — goodness only knew when he 'd come home. Fee would worry; Betty would wonder; Alice would be unhappy — she 'd feel the trouble came through her; and Phil — ! All at once the annoyance died out of my heart, and I only felt awfully sorry for poor Phil!

"Felix! Phil! Jack! where are you all?" called Betty from the piazza. "You 're a nice set of cavaliers to go off and leave us!"

I was n't sorry to hear her voice, for then Fee had to rouse up; as we walked up the path we heard the whistle of the 8.50 train for New York.

But Alice was n't on the piazza or in the drawing-room.

"She has gone upstairs to write letters," Betty explained indignantly. "Where 's Phil? How could you all be so rude as to walk off and leave Alice alone? When I came out she was in a dark corner of the piazza — just moping. Where is Phil?" she repeated.

"I think he has gone up to the city," Felix answered unsteadily.

"To the city!" Betty's eyes got big with surprise. "Why, what under the sun —" She looked from one to the other of us; then, in an instant — she *is* so quick! — she grasped the situation. "Poor fellow!" she said softly. "Why *did* he speak to her! If he had only told me —" She broke off abruptly. "I 'm going up to Alice; I know she must feel dreadfully to have had it happen," she announced. And off she went.

She was gone a long time; Fee and I stayed on the piazza, but I don't think we said ten words to each other. He sat out of the light, leaning his head on his hand; and after a while I got so sleepy I could hardly keep my eyes open. But I tell you, they flew open in a hurry and I gave a tremendous jump when a voice whispered, almost at my elbow, "Master Jack! I want to speak to you."

It was Jake, the man who takes care of our horse.

"What is it, Jake?" Felix put in quietly, before I could say a word.

"Well, sir — it 's — er — I — heard, sir —" he began hesitatingly.

But Fee broke in, "Out with it, *quick!*" he commanded.

"The 8.50, sir — there 's been a smash up — train run off an embankment 'long by Morris's meader —"

I gasped, and, getting on his feet like a flash, Felix caught Jake's arm. "My brother —" he cried out. "He went on that train!"

"Yes, sir — I seen 'im step on. There 's an awful confusion down there, Mr. Felix — can't tell who 's hurt — nobody knows yet. I cut through the field jes' as soon 's I heard, to tell you."

"Thank you, Jake, that was kind. Get Pegasus harnessed up, bring the wagon to the lower gate — we 'll meet you there — work like lightning, Jake — human lives may de-

pend on our quickness." Fee gave his orders without a tremor in his voice, but when we got in the light I saw his face was white and drawn.

Betty was coming down the stairs as we stepped into the hall, and she flew to us: "What is it? What is it? Something is wrong, I know," she cried.

As kindly as was possible with a few words, Fee told her, ending with, "Keep it from Alice as long as you can — please God, Phil — is unhurt."

Betty got very pale, and her eyes dilated with terror, but she kept her wits; and she and I flew about getting brandy and the other things Fee told us of.

We got off very quietly; and the way we made Pegasus travel that night must 've been a surprise to the old horse. Fee was over the dashboard half the time urging him on with whip and voice, until we reached Morris's meadow.

What a scene of confusion that was!

Three cars and the engine had gone over the embankment, and lay overturned. One of the cars had caught fire — thank God it was empty! — and the flames crackled and sputtered and roared, throwing a wild, lurid light over everything. From the other two cars people were crawling — or being hauled — through the windows, or any other outlet that could be found or made. Men were yelling and shouting, women and children shrieking; and every now and then the engine gave a wild panting snort, — almost like some living thing in agony. Those that had come to help and those that were unhurt had banded themselves into an ambulance corps; stretchers had been improvised; and whoever was injured or had fainted, or was at all disabled, was carried off in that way to the village and to neighbouring houses.

Felix gripped my arm tight, and together we stumbled over the uneven ground and clambered down the embankment; how Fee did it I can't see — but he got there! And the

minute he reached the bottom he grabbed hold of a man that was rushing past with a child in his arms — I had n't seen him. "Jenkins," he cried, — 't was a conductor that we had travelled with scores of times, — "where 's my brother?"

He stopped reluctantly. "He was on the train — I saw him a few minutes before we went over — where he is now, Mr. Felix, I can't say."

"Was your train full?" queried a voice at our elbow.

"No, sir — not half full, thank God!" Jenkins answered fervently; then he ran on with the child, who was unhurt, but frightened.

"Now we must hunt him up," Fee said.

"But how can you stand it?" I urged; "let me — "

"You 'll see how I stand it," he cried decidedly. "Come on!" and our search for Phil began.

Well, the way Fee climbed about that night was something marvellous. With one hand locked in my arm, — he said afterward, like an Old Man of the Sea, — and his cane, he swung himself up and down and over piles of rubbish at a rate that went ahead of many a well man there; and as we went along he gave a helping hand to those that needed it.

I *knew* he 'd pay up for all this; but there was no holding him back now, and I could have gone on all night myself; it was the dread in our hearts that urged us on.

At last we came across a guard who declared he had seen Phil *since* the accident. That gave us fresh courage; after that we began calling out, "Phil!" "Phil Rose!" "Phil!" and while I held him up, Felix put his hands to his mouth and gave a peculiar long, shrill call that he and Phil have used to signal to each other ever since they were boys. Two, three times the call sounded, and then — oh! how our hearts leaped! we heard the answer. Well, the way we made for that spot was a caution, and there was Phil at the head of a band of workers, unhurt and doing his full share to help others.

"Felix! Jack!" he exclaimed, in utter amaze.

"Philippus!"

I choked up so I could n't speak, and for a minute or two we just stood and held on to each other; we could n't find a word.

Phil was the first to speak: "I said I was going to the devil; but God has granted me a respite." His voice broke; and somebody — I don't know if 't was Felix or I — said, "Amen."

Now that Phil was found and safe, Fee's strength suddenly gave out. He lay on one of the stretchers until it was positive that everybody was out of the overturned cars; then Phil picked him up and, carrying him to the carriage, we started for home.

"How stands the list, Jenkins?" Phil asked, as he took up the reins.

"Well, sir, better than I expected," was the answer. "All desperately scared; a good many shook up and bruised, a few badly hurt, but not one killed. It 's a miracle, Mr. Phil, a miracle, that we was n't all hurled into eternity, or — worse still — roasted to death. We 've got a good deal to be thankful for."

"Aye!" was all Phil said; but Fee and I knew it came from the bottom of his heart.

Fee was too used up to even stand; so taking him in his arms — you should 've seen the tender way he did it too! — Phil walked up the gravel path; but he did n't stride angrily this time, he went very gently.

Late as it was, the front door stood open, and a bright light streamed out into the darkness. I ran ahead to assure Betty; but the girl that came to meet me was Alice. And I doubt if she heard one word I said, for her frightened eyes had gone beyond me, and were fixed on Felix as he lay nerveless in Phil's arms, his eyes closed from sheer exhaustion, his head resting wearily on Phil's shoulder.

She ran swiftly forward, her hands out, every particle of colour gone from her face. "Is he hurt? Is Felix — hurt?" she cried; and the tone of her voice, the look in her eyes, told Phil something that I guess he had n't dreamed of.

He got perfectly white, and for a minute stood and stared at her; then he crossed the hall and laid Fee on a lounge. "He is n't hurt," he said very gently; "but he has been making superhuman efforts down there in the meadow — looking for me, and — this is the reaction. He is exhausted."

Felix opened his eyes, and tried to sit up. "I 'm all right now," he declared, to reassure Alice; but, in spite of this brave assertion, he could n't hold his head up.

"Oh, can't we do something for him?" entreated Alice. Then Fee looked up at her; and the blood came rushing back to her cheeks in a flood of pretty colour.

The dining-room door flew open, and out ran Betty; she looked gay and smiling. "Oh, Phil, you darling! I 'm so *thankful* you are safe!" she exclaimed; flying at him, she hugged and kissed him. "Oh, my dears! my dears! *such* news!" she began joyously; then her eyes fell on Felix, and her expression changed. "Oh, Fee, I was afraid of this, — you are completely worn out, — you dear, faithful boy! But never mind! there 's somebody here that can help you — Oh, I *must* tell the news, or something will happen to me. Listen! listen! every one of you: papa is home, and Dr. Gordon is with him. They met on the train coming from Boston, and came down here together. On account of the accident, papa's train was detained at Hampton; so taking a carriage he drove home, and the doctor with him. And what do you think has brought Dr. Gordon? My dear," she waved her hand at Fee, "he has just heard of some new treatment for cases like yours. It is working *marvels!* perfect *wonders!* And he wants you to give it a trial. He seems sanguine it will help you."

Fee's eyes opened, and lighted up; he grasped the back of the lounge and dragged himself to a sitting posture. "What is it? Where is it?" he asked eagerly; though he spoke to Betty, he glanced at Alice. And her eyes grew bright too.

"It is a discovery of a celebrated German physician, and you would have to go to Germany and put yourself under his treatment for two years." Betty said this as lightly as if the expense of a trip to Europe, and of two years' attendance of a celebrated physician was a matter of no importance whatever in our family.

The hope died out of Felix's face; he sank back, and closed his eyes wearily. "Too bad Gordon took the trouble to come down for nothing," he said. "The sort of thing you describe is quite out of the question."

But Betty laughed gleefully. I wondered how she could be so cruel, or if all the excitement of the evening had upset her common sense. And I guess Phil felt so, too, for he said gruffly, "I don't see the joke, Betty. Where 's Gordon? He had better take a look at Fee."

He started for the dining-room; but Betty flew after him and pulled him back. "Stay here, *do* stay here!" she implored, "I have n't told all yet." She stood in the middle of the floor and beamed on us. "You ought to go — you can go — you *are* to go —" she declared, looking straight at Fee, "and what is more — Dr. Gordon is going with you."

Felix was on his elbow again, one hand holding on to the back of the lounge, gazing intently at her.

"There will be no difficulty about the expense," went on Betty, with dancing eyes, "for — what *do* you think? — aunt Lindsay," her face sobered a little, "has left us — *all her money!*"

We stared at her in speechless amazement.

"True — every word of it!" she declared, nodding her

head to add emphasis. "Papa and each one of us is remembered. Nan gets a goodly share, and the bulk of her fortune — it seems she was quite well off — goes to her godson — Felix Wilfred Rose! — 'as a slight token of her admiration for his patience and fortitude' — that is what papa said. So you can go to Europe and be treated galore! Oh, goodness! Alice — what have I done! Call Dr. Gordon, somebody quick — Phil! Jack — "

For Fee's head had suddenly sunk back on the cushions; he had fainted dead away.

XX.

TWO YEARS AFTER.

TOLD BY NANNIE.

"MRS. WHITCOMBE, ma'am," announced my maid; and right behind her appeared Nora.

"What are you doing? — oh, I see," she said, dropping into a chair after she had kissed me. "Can't you go with me and spend to-day with Betty?" she added in a fretful tone. "This is one of the days when I am sick and tired of everything; perhaps it will do me good to go down and hear the home gossip, and eat some plain fare. If we get there early enough, Cook may make us some of her gooseberry tarts for lunch. How we used to enjoy them! But I would n't dare propose anything so simple to my high and mighty *chef*. How that child does grow!" she ended with a sigh.

I knew why that sigh came, and why she looked so wistfully at my beautiful boy, as I sat there giving him his morning bath.

A wee daughter had come to Nora and Chad, to their great delight; but she had only stayed with them for a few months, and, though Nonie rarely spoke of her loss, I knew that sometimes her heart was very sore over it.

Since little Margaret's death, we have noticed a change in her. She is not so absorbed in fashionable society. Many a morning she lets some amusement pass and comes to me to watch baby enjoy his bath. She goes home oftener, and instead of turning up her nose at the quiet happenings there, as she used to, now she seems to be really interested.

Max and I think Nonie is not satisfied with her gay, useless way of living, and we are praying that this feeling may strengthen until it leads her to better things. Her influence over Chad is so great that any such change in her would be sure to affect him.

Once Nora thought that to be wealthy and fashionable, with her beauty, must mean great happiness; but I fancy she knows different now. Dear sister! It is such a happiness to see her turning more and more to me; and I love to have her take my boy on her lap and play with him, as she does sometimes. I don't wonder she is fond of him, for though, to use one of Nurse's phrases, "I say it as should n't," he *is* a beauty. He was christened in the old brown church where we all attend, as Felix Maxwell Derwent, but he very rarely hears his name, being known in the family as "Son" and "Nannie's baby." He is the dearest, happiest little soul! with his father's eyes, and with yellow hair that is as soft and fine as spun silk, — Nurse says it is just the colour of Mädel's hair when she was a baby.



"Nannie's baby."

Everybody at home makes a great time over Son; and they all devote themselves so to him that I 'm afraid they will spoil him. It is too funny to see papa trying to play with him! He likes me to take the baby in the study whenever I am at the house, and he lets him creep about for a while hauling

and pulling at books and investigating things generally, as none of us was ever allowed to do. And Son has not the slightest fear of his grandsire, — he pulls his mustache whenever he gets the chance, and laughs and crows with papa as readily as with the youngest members of the family. The old high-chair — in which we have all sat, from Phil to Alan — is always brought out for my boy's use, and he sits up at the school-room table and thumps it with a spoon or anything else he can get hold of, with a most imposing air of ownership. But there, I must stop talking of that baby of mine!

"I was *just* going to propose to you that we should spend to-day at home. I 've a letter from Fee, and I will read it aloud when we are all together," I said, in answer to Nora's remark. "We can start as soon as Son is ready." And so we did, — when the wee man had splashed in the water to his heart's content, and had been got into his white frock, his soft, warm white coat, and his jaunty white hat, the *pom-pons* in which he would have loved dearly to pull to pieces. Then we got into Nora's brougham, which was waiting, and were driven home.

Hannah opened the door, and I saw the quick look of satisfaction which spread over her face when she saw that I held Son myself. I used to have a maid along, to take care of him when I went home, until I found that Nurse and Hannah regarded my doing so as a personal insult. They looked upon Annette as an interloper, and Nurse was heard to declare loudly, with sniff after sniff, that "she 'd raised more children than anybody could shake a stick at, and she guessed at *her* time of life she could be trusted with 'Miss Nannie's' baby." After that I always carried Son down myself; and for that day Nurse would be perfectly happy, — she dearly loves taking care of a baby.

We had scarcely got in the hall when Betty came flying down the steps to meet us, crying out: "Oh, you dear

things! I 'm *so* glad you 've come! I have been pining for a regular gossip with you two." One might have imagined she had n't seen us for months! Then she caught the boy from me. "Oh, you *darling*, blessed baby!" she exclaimed between her clinched teeth, — why *do* women always clinch their teeth when they call a baby pet names? As Phil would say, I ask this for information. "You sweetest morsel!" She buried her nose in his fat little neck, and made him laugh out loud.

But she was not to have him to herself, for in some mysteriously rapid manner Hannah had spread the tidings of our arrival. Nurse appeared from the basement, and coolly and authoritatively put out her arms with: "Come, me lamb! Come to your old Nursie. Come, then, me pet," dandling her hands invitingly before my son's eyes. A door banged violently somewhere in the upper regions, and in a minute or two Kathie, Mädel, and the two boys came racing down the steps, Miss Marston bringing up the rear. "They got so excited when they heard the baby was here that I thought we had better all come down and get a look at him," she said in an apologetic tone.

Good, kind Miss Marston! as if I did n't know — and love her for it — that she was as eager to see Son as any of the others. Everybody crowded round him as he sat aloft in Nurse's arms right there in the hall, and everybody talked and chirruped to him, laughed with him, and tickled and kissed him all at once.

Some babies might have cried or got frightened or shy, but my son enjoyed it all. He sat there laughing and crowing, dancing gaily up and down with delight, and making spasmodic clutches at the hair, nose, or any salient point of his admirers that might present itself.

Presently, above the confusion I heard Nora's voice asking plaintively: "Won't *some*body listen to me? *Could n't* we have gooseberry tarts for lunch? And won't somebody

please tell Cook, so she will have time to make them? You know the kind I mean, Betty, — 'individual' tarts, as Phil used to call them — about so big — see!" She made an O with her daintily gloved thumbs and index fingers, and looked anxiously at Betty.

But just then Betty was a "bear," growling behind Nurse's shoulder for Son's benefit and pretending to chew up the fat, rosy-tipped little hand which he fearlessly poked at her. "All right, yes, certainly," she answered between the growls. "Kathie, go tell Cook."

Kathie was playing "Creep Mousie," up the front of the boy's coat, and passed along the commission to Mädel. "You go, Mädel," she remarked.

"Oh, he 's got hold of *my* hair, — do see!" cried Mädel, in great delight. "Judge, you tell Cook about the tarts."

"The queen of tarts, she made some hearts — new version," sang Judge, leaning up against the wall, his hands in his pockets, eyeing the group before him; and that was all the attention he vouchsafed.

"Well, then, Alan, *you* go like a good boy," urged Kathie, but without turning her head.

"Not much!" declared Alan, briefly.

He was astride the newel-post, a grimy-looking handkerchief knotted about his fingers, and making rabbits and other grotesque figures which he flourished above the heads of the others, calling out, "Hey, Son! look! — see this — see!" in the fond hope of attracting his nephew's attention.

"Well, I declare! — you have all gone baby-mad," exclaimed Nora, in disgust. "I 'll go and tell Cook myself." And catching up her silken skirts, she ran down the basement steps as papa opened his study door and came toward us.

"Ah, my dear!" he said, with a pleased look at Son, "I am glad to see you." He touched baby's face with one of his long, thin fingers, and had it immediately captured by a

soft, warm little hand, while the owner of the hand cooed and crowed and laughed up in his face as if he had done a great thing, papa smiling down in return.

Suddenly such a longing came over me to have dear mamma see that group, to have her see and love my baby! I have missed her many times in my life since she left us, but never so much, it seems to me, as since I have been married and have a child of my own. With each new experience I long more and more for her love and counsel, to show her my happiness — she was fond of Max! — to ask her help in bringing up our child. Well, who knows? — she may see; she may know all that I would show and tell her. And there is always the dear Lord to turn to for comfort and guidance.

Papa's voice came dimly to me. "Betty, would n't your sister be more comfortable if she took off her bonnet and wraps?" he suggested. He calls even Nora's airy French confections "bonnets"!

She came along the hall just then, looking triumphant. "Cook is going to make them," she announced. "And she was just as nice over it too. How d' you do, papa?" putting up her face to be kissed.

While we were chattering there in the hall it seemed like old times, when we would all be talking at once, and the hubbub would be so great that Fee would have to rap loudly for order, and ask at the top of his voice, in order to be heard, "Who *am* I talking to?" But in a little while, when Nurse had carried off Son, and the four younger children had gone back to the school-room with Miss Marston, the house grew very still, and a sense of loneliness fell on us.

"Is n't it quiet!" Nora said. "I am sure papa can't complain now. He ought to be able to finish this book in a much shorter time than he did the Fetich. Does he like that young man who helps him?" Papa has a paid assistant now, since aunt Lindsay's legacy.

"I suppose so, — he never says anything about it," answered Betty. "You have a letter from Fee, Nan? Well, I have one from Alice. Come on upstairs, girls, and we 'll have a nice talk."

But first I should tell you a little of what has occurred in these last two years — since that August night at the Cottage when so much happened; when God in His mercy spared Phil's life; when papa returned home with the unexpected tidings that aunt Lindsay had left Felix the bulk of her fortune, and when Dr. Gordon came with him, excited and earnest over a new treatment he had heard of, which he felt convinced would help Fee.

Fee was so exhausted by his efforts that night that he had to lie in bed, flat on his back, for two weeks; then, just as soon as he could be moved, Dr. Gordon and he sailed for Germany. There was no difficulty now in the way of money, for though what aunt Lindsay had left Fee did not make him wealthy, it was ample for all his wants. And it was most fortunate for him that Dr. Gordon wanted to study the treatment and could go abroad with him. He could n't have gone under better care; and the two had been away for two long years.

Max and I came home from the West to find Fee gone; but he had left me a dear letter of good-bye. And in it he had poured out his heart to me as he might not have been able to had we been face to face, — it is hard for Fee to put his deepest, most sacred feelings into words. "I have tried to accept in the right spirit — with patience — what seemed to be my narrow lot," he finished, "and to put that which would have been a selfish happiness from me. What this has cost me, you can guess. But with this new prospect of health and strength comes a hope, so sweet, so strong, so full of joy, that I *cannot* put it away. We are told that the prayers of the righteous avail with God. Nan, dear brave other self of me, my comfort and help alway, oh, pray for

your twinnie! Implore the Lord to grant me health, to grant me happiness — the happiness I crave — if it be well in His sight. With the example of Christ before me, I dare not ask for this, my dearest hope, without that clause, — rather one should suffer than two! But if — God be with you! FELIX."

Dear, brave brother! My warmest, most earnest prayers went up to heaven for him.

And the accounts of Fee's progress toward recovery which his constant letters and Dr. Gordon's brought us cheered our hearts. At first there had been weeks of uncertainty, — when the great German physician refused to give any positive hope that he could help Felix. But that was long ago; since then he had made a wonderful stride toward health, and now, while we knew that Fee would never be as robust as Phil or the rest of us, there was, Dr. Gordon wrote, "every prospect that with care Felix would live to be an old man, and be able to do his quota of work in the world."

There was a general family rejoicing over this, and Phil was extravagant enough to cable to Fee from Chicago: "Hurrah for the future Judge of the Supreme Court!" Nora and Chad also cabled; and jubilant letters went out to Germany from different members of the family.

But I was n't really satisfied until the good news was confirmed by Felix, and it was weeks later before that confirmation came.

"Gordon was a trifle too 'previous' in his glowing accounts of my health," Fee wrote; "he went away ahead of Dr. Vlankoop; and I think he was rather provoked that I did n't 'enthuse' more to you people about it. But we have had too many disappointments with this old back of mine to risk another, so I thought best to wait and be quite sure, before I raised any hope at home, or got excited over it myself. Now, Vlankoop, who is caution itself, has

given me his plain opinion of my condition. It is more encouraging than anything I ever expected to hear on that score; and it is so confirmed by my own judgment — for I have watched and weighed each symptom as closely as he and far more anxiously — that with his consent I shall sail for home about the 14th or 16th of this month. That will bring me home in time to spend Christmas with you all. I will write you later the exact date of leaving here, and other particulars; until you receive that letter, say nothing to the family about my intention to return. Don't look for too great a change in me, — I am still lame; and I will always have to treat my spinal column with marked consideration, — to '*mich gut pflegen*,' as Vlankoop keeps telling me. But I am more secure on my feet, and, thank God! I am no longer an invalid."

From Dr. Gordon we learned of the severe, almost heroic, treatment which Fee underwent; but not a word did he himself say about it. His letters were uniformly cheerful; and it was characteristic of him that not once did he touch on what I knew was nearest to his heart. I always wrote all I knew of Alice and her doings, and I *know* he was glad to hear, but he rarely referred to any of it in his replies. Soon after Felix left for Germany, Alice had joined her father and mother in Italy, and she remained abroad with them for a year. They had been home for some time now, though we had seen nothing of Alice. Several times Nora and I had invited her to visit us, but there had always been some reason or other why she could not come. She had not even stayed with Betty since that eventful August visit, though they two kept up a regular correspondence.

"Take chairs, my dears, and make yourselves 'comfy.' Now, let's talk. Tell me your news, and I will tell you mine." Betty dropped into a rocking-chair as she spoke, and looked expectantly at us.

"Nannie has the news. *I* shall play audience; and I

expect to be entertained too," Nora informed us, lounging off in her chair.

"I have a letter from Fee," I said. "Girls, he will be with us on the 23d or 24th —"

"Of *this* month?" interrupted Betty, in great excitement, springing up.

"In time to spend Christmas with us," I finished.

"Alice is coming on the 23d, too — to spend Christmas!" exclaimed Betty, sinking back on the arm of the rocker; then we three looked at each other.

"I don't think Alice treated Phil at all well," Nora remarked presently, in the tone of one who expects to be contradicted.

Betty responded promptly. "Alice was nice to Phil, but she never gave him the *least* encouragement to think she was in love with him," she exclaimed warmly. "Phil was as blind as a mole, — *that* was the trouble. Everybody discouraged him — as much as we could without coming right out and giving a reason. But no, he *would n't* take a hint, — he must needs go on and get a refusal. What a night that was! Before it ended, though, I guess he understood why Alice could n't take him. Poor old Phil! It was what he calls a 'knock-down blow.' But, girls, I was proud of the way he acted during those ten days before he left for Chicago — he behaved *beautifully!*"

A pleased smile played around Nonie's lips. "He did?" she said, bending forward with an air of genuine interest. "Tell us about it." And I chimed in with "Yes, do, Betty."

We had heard the story more than once — to the smallest detail — but knowing just what was coming did not lessen our enjoyment in hearing it again. That is one of the beauties of these "family tales," as Betty calls them, — they have a never-failing interest, which we find grows stronger instead of lessening as time passes.

So, sure of her audience, Betty began: "My dears! that *was* a night! I have the queerest feeling about it now, — it seems like a dream to me. And yet each incident is perfectly clear in my mind. But *was n't* I frightened when Fee fainted! I cried out to the boys to call Dr. Gordon, then flew to the dining-room, where he and papa were having something to eat, and called him myself. When I got back to Fee, Alice was kneeling by him, his head on her arm, holding a bottle of smelling-salts to his nose, — where the salts came from, I 've no idea. Her face was as white as his, and when she looked up at me the expression in her eyes made me long to put my arms right round her and hug her, — it was more pathetic than tears could have been. But she was calmer than I, and she helped me wonderfully in doing things. Jack was rubbing Fee's hands; just at first Phil stood gazing at Alice in a bewildered sort of way, — poor Phil! I felt so *sorry* for him! — then with a sudden start he roused up and began to make himself useful. After we had got Fee to bed, and the house had quieted down, — it was almost morning, — there was a chance to say a few words alone to Phil. I wanted so to comfort the poor fellow; but, as you people know, my wits always desert me when I most need them." Betty sat up and looked deprecatingly at Nora and me. "All I could do was to hang on to Phil's hand and keep saying, 'You poor old boy!' It was so stupid of me! Now *you*," with a glance at Nora, "or Nan would have thought of and said just the right thing."

Nora smiled graciously. "*I* think it is a gift, a regular talent, like that of painting or writing or sculpturing, to be able always to say and do the proper thing," she remarked, with that little air of superiority that is apt to upset Betty's good-nature.

"How did he take it? What did Phil say?" I put in hastily.

Betty laughed. "He put his other hand up and patted

my face," she continued presently; "then he said, '*'Tis* hard! But I've brought it on myself, — I don't blame her one atom. I was a conceited ass to think she'd care for me — with — Felix — ' He broke off abruptly, and walked away; then came back to me. 'She is a *noble* girl, Betty! — brave — loyal. Oh, if I might give my health and strength to Felix! I'm afraid there's sore trouble ahead of her. She is your friend — oh, be tender with her — ' His voice shook so that he had to stop, his face was working, and two great big tears ran down his cheeks. Girls, I can't tell you how I felt when I saw those tears — Phil! our bluff, manly Phil! And I knew that they were shed for Alice, not for himself. Do you remember in the Bible it speaks of this one or that one who in great sorrow and anguish 'lifted up his voice and wept'? Well, that was what I could have done right there, — it would have been a relief to me to just *howl* out loud! I felt so dreadfully sorry for Phil, for Alice — for Felix!" Betty paused, and cleared her throat vigorously; looking up at the pictures and the ceiling, winking hard meanwhile in a vain attempt to absorb the tears she was unwilling we should see were in her eyes.

But she need n't have minded, for Nonie and I were keeping her company in that respect.

"Felix is not bad-looking, and of course he is very clever," Nora said, with energy, sitting up straight in her chair; "but really, I *cannot* see how any girl could prefer him to Phil!" And she dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, — if so inelegant a word as "dab" could be applied to any action of so elegant a creature as our Nonie.

I did n't say anything; there was no use; but I could n't help wondering, as I had many a time before, why it was that Nora had never realised the charm of Felix, which we all felt. Betty and I looked at each other and smiled.

"There is certainly no accounting for taste," Betty remarked demurely, but with dancing eyes, — she does love

to tease Nora! "We all thought that when you took Ch— "

"But you have n't finished about Phil," I broke in ruthlessly. I knew Betty was on dangerous ground; it is a standing grievance with Nonie that Chad is not regarded by the family as my dear husband is, — she forgets, or does not realise, the great difference between the two men! As I spoke I threw an appealing glance at Miss Elizabeth, which had its effect.

"What were you going to remark?" asked Nora, stiffly; but Betty pretended not to hear.

"As I said before — Phil behaved *beautifully* for the rest of those ten days," she resumed. "He was just as nice and kind and helpful as he could be — and no one would ever have dreamed, from his manner to her, that there had been any affair between Alice and himself. He acted toward her like a dear, kind, considerate brother. And he was devoted to Fee, — I can't imagine what we should have done without him. The day before he left home for Chicago, he and Felix had a long talk. That was the first day Fee was strong enough to be on the lounge, and they were shut up together for over an hour. Nobody heard what the subject of their talk was, but from something Phil said I think I know." Betty stopped, and sat looking thoughtfully down at her lap.

"Well?" I reminded her. We knew what came next, but we wanted to hear it.

"I was on the piazza steps that afternoon when Phil came swinging along the path from the long walk which he 'd started on as soon as he came out of Fee's room. He had grown thin and older-looking in that fortnight, — and now there was a perplexed expression in his eyes. He stood by me for a few minutes, gazing thoughtfully out over the water. Presently he said, in a dreamy tone, almost as if he were unconscious of speaking: 'It 's a conundrum with me which

course is the more unselfish, — to avert a possible sorrow or to contribute to a great happiness?'

"You know, girls, how stupid I generally am at conundrums," Betty glanced at us; "but somehow I guessed this one of Phil's. And an answer seemed to come right to my lips. 'To avert a possible sorrow, if honour point that way,' I said. Phil opened his eyes in surprise. '*You* think so, too, — so does he.' He motioned with his thumb in the direction of Fee's bedroom. 'I don't know if I could do it,' he added slowly. The next day he started for Chicago. And the day after that, Alice's visit came to an end — "

"Why do you always stop there?" demanded Nora. "I know there is something more, and I don't see why I should n't hear it. You and Nannie are not the only ones that care for Alice, — *I* love her too." Her tone was sharp, and the colour deepened in her cheeks.

"There is very little more to tell," Betty said presently, slowly; "very little — and we three who are so deeply interested can but love those two the more for it. Just a few minutes before she left for the train Alice went in to bid Felix good-bye and she asked me to go with her. He expected us, and sat up on the lounge and held out his hand. Fee fell away dreadfully in those ten days, — he looked *so* frail! Perhaps it was the contrast with Alice that made him seem so, — she is such a splendid specimen of health, though she had n't much colour that day. 'I 've come to say good-bye," Alice said, putting her hand into his. Fee was white to his very lips. 'Good-bye.' He looked right up at her. 'Wish me God-speed, Alice, — you know what this — means to me!' His voice was hoarse, and his lips quivered so that he could scarcely speak. Alice knelt down by him, and, laying her other dear, brave, strong hand over his, held it in a firm clasp. 'Yes, I know,' she said — oh, girls, I can't *tell* you all there was in those few words! 'God bless you and keep you in safety, Felix, and grant

you health and strength.' That was all — then she went away, to Mrs. Erveng."

There was a little silence after that, then Nora remarked: "Alice *is* a noble girl! And — as long as she won't have Phil — would n't it be perfectly lovely if she and Felix would marry and come and live here? Papa would like it, I think, — he is fond of Alice; and Jack and Kathie and the younger ones fairly adore her. Then, Betty, would come your turn — Hilliard has been so patient. Would n't that work nicely, Nan?"

"Yes — '*if!*'" I said, smiling. "You know it is over two years since all that Betty has just told us happened. Better not make plans for any one until you know how matters stand with him or her."

"And now, in a few weeks we shall all be together again," observed Betty. "Papa wants all you married ones" — a wave of her hand included Nora and me — "to come home to spend Christmas. He is going to speak to you about it to-day. You must be sure to bring Son, Nannie, and we 'll have a tree for him. Phil has written that he will be on — and now Felix and my dear Alice! Somebody else will be here too," a spot of pretty colour flamed suddenly on each cheek. "Hill is coming for a week — "

"I do think he is the most patient creature!" interrupted Nora. "How much longer is he to be kept waiting?"

"I am not doing any more than Nan did," answered Betty, with a loving glance at me. "But," she added, "I am afraid Hilliard is not so patient as you think. He wants to speak to papa about — our being married. I have tried to get him to wait a little longer; but — he is persistent, you know," she smiled, "and I am not at all sure that I can prevent his doing it. As far as looking after the house is concerned, I am sure Kathie could do that far better than I. She is what Nurse calls a 'born manager' — she even manages Nurse! which is more than I could ever do. But she is n't

quite sixteen, — she seems so young to assume so heavy a responsibility — "

" Indeed, I am quite as old as Nan was when *she* took charge of everything. And there is less to see to now, besides," an unexpected voice replied; and Kathie walked in and stood by Nora's chair.

Kathie has grown to be a very pretty girl; fair as a lily, and with a pink and white complexion equal to Nora's. The heavy braid of golden hair that hangs down her back curls at the ends, and so do innumerable little locks around her temples. What Betty said was true. Kathie has become a splendid little housekeeper. What my dear, hasty, impulsive Betty had had to work hard to acquire came as second nature to this younger sister. The tiresome details which had so troubled her — though she kept that from me for a long time — were an enjoyment to Kathie, and she was perfectly willing to take the whole care of the home on her shoulders. But those two years had done more for Betty than merely to make her familiar with the details of housekeeping. They had brought her self-control and a fair measure of patience, with more tact and consideration for others. The rough edges of her character had smoothed down, she had grown gentler, more thoughtful, more willing to make allowances for the shortcomings of others, yet without losing the gay, happy originality that had made her so attractive. In a word, in those two years, from a wayward, irresponsible child, Betty had developed into a charming and noble woman.

I think she realises that the discipline, unwelcome though it was, has done her good, for, one day, when she and I were talking of her engagement, — Betty's engagement to Hilliard has been an acknowledged fact for more than a year now, — she said in that whimsical way of hers: " What a stroke of good fortune for Mrs. Erveng that I have had these two years to tame me down, before becoming a mem-



"'Indeed, I am quite as old as Nan was when *she* took charge of everything.'"



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ber of her family! Though she wrote me that pretty note, and called me her daughter, and said all those other nice things, I know, deep down in my heart, that she considered me a wild, harum-scarum, awkward creature, entirely lacking in 'repose of manner,' — and not half good enough for Hill. I told him so that night on the beach. I said: 'Your mother will say, "What *can* my son see to admire in that great, rough, uncouth, flippant tomboy?"' Oh, I put it strong, Nan; but he *would n't* be warned." A happy little smile curved the corners of her lips, her eyes grew tender. "If I had married Hilliard then," rousing up, "I am convinced there would have been war between my 'culchawed' mamma-in-law and me — she used to provoke me so! But now — well, I think perhaps we could get along now. At least I should do my best to have it so. I know that many of our ideas are diametrically opposed to each other, and always will be; but all the same I do *hope* she 'll love me, — Hill's mother! Oh, Nan, if I could only get her to love me as Mrs. Derwent loves you!" The wistfulness in her voice touched me.

Though I was well pleased with Betty's sentiments toward Mrs. Erveng, I was infinitely relieved when there seemed a certainty that Hilliard would before long take charge of the branch agency of his father's firm, in New York, so that Betty and Hill's mother would not have to live in the same house. Betty's intentions are excellent, but her temper is still rather short; and we all know that Mrs. Erveng is inclined to be jealous where the affection of her only son is concerned. Those two will be better friends living apart than together.

But I must go back to our conversation that day at the house.

"If Kathie is competent, and willing to take your place here, I can't see why you don't let her do it," remarked Nora, after Kathie's speech. I saw her stealing glances of

admiration at her favourite sister, who had taken a chair beside her; and, reaching out her hand, with a loving touch she arranged the curly tendrils of Kathie's hair, which would get loose and float about her temples. "The family is so much smaller now; and the servants are devoted to her," a little triumph in her voice here, — there are days even now when Betty has her "tilts" with Nurse and Cook, and Nora knows that. "And *we*," with a strong emphasis and a glance at me, "would see that she did not overwork." She gave a final pat to Kathie's fair hair, and sat back in her chair with an air of having settled the matter.

Kathie smiled, — such a demure little smile! "Oh, I sha'n't overwork," she assured us, adding, in a superior manner, so like Nonie's that I could scarcely keep a straight face: "When I get things arranged my way, there 'll not be so much to do. And there will be Mädel — if I need help, and — "

"Yes, and Jack," interrupted Betty. "Oh, girls," turning to us with an impulsive gesture, "you can't think what a comfort Jack has been to me in these two years. I really don't know what I *should* have done without him! I don't mean only in the way of doing things for me, but — " Betty hesitated, and her cheeks got pink — "Jack is so — well, so unconsciously — I can't think of any other word to express it — so unconsciously good, that he helps one to keep up to the mark. He has his faults — nobody knows them better than I — and he provokes me so sometimes that I simply *have* to fly out at him; but all the same — mark my words — Jack is a person that will do a great deal of good in the world. And the beauty of it is that he himself will never know it, — such a thought would never occur to him. I used to laugh when Alice called him 'Galahad,' — but I understand now what she meant. Don't you go and tell him," turning abruptly to Kathie, "or Judge, either, that Alice said he was like Galahad."

Kathie bridled up, and tossed back the heavy braid of hair that had fallen over her shoulder. "The idea, Betty! As if I would do such a thing!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"Jack is single-hearted, — he is one of those who are 'pure in heart,'" I put in hastily; I knew the quality in Jack that she meant.

Nora's fingers were tapping impatiently on the arm of her chair. "It is well he is something," she said drily, before Betty could do more than give me a grateful glance, "for he is certainly not clever. From all I hear, I should judge he was not distinguishing himself in college."

"Clever!" echoed Betty, warmly; "brilliancy in college is not *always* a criterion of great ability, let me tell you. Jack Rose is more than clever. Has it ever occurred to any of you people," she looked pointedly at each in turn, "that Jack may be — a genius?"

There was a startled, simultaneous response.

From Nora, incredulously: "A *genius! Jack* — a *genius?* Well! what next!" From Kathie, most reproachfully: "Why, Betty! He is n't one half — not one *quarter* — as smart as Judge!" From me: "Yes, Betty, it *has* occurred to me, in reading those stories of his, — they are so unusual, — that perhaps Jack was very clever, and we did n't know it."

"Other people know it, if we don't," cried Betty. "Listen to this." She took a letter from her desk, and opening it read aloud: "'My father is following Jack's literary work with the deepest interest. He thinks *very* highly of the quality of it, and it is a question in his mind if you have not a genius among you. He says the stories that Jack has had published are now enough to make a good-sized volume, and he intends writing soon to offer to publish them in book form for him. One who is a competent judge of such writing tells us that he considers Jack's stories are almost classic in their simplicity of style, and quite remarkable as being the work of a lad not yet twenty years of age. My opinion on

this subject you have known for a long time.' This is what Mr. Erveng, an experienced publisher, and Hilliard, and their unknown friend, and perhaps a good many more people, think of Jack," remarked Betty, impressively. "*We*, his own people, are the last to find out or to acknowledge what he is."

I was delighted to hear what Hill wrote; Kathie sat speechless, staring at Betty, unable to master the fact that Jack, who was so slow with his studies, whom Judge was always teasing and making fun of, could *possibly* be clever — cleverer than Judge himself!

"'The Lark' and those other stories are very nice — I spoke of it to Chad, when I read them — but I have never thought them anything *wonderful*. A genius! *Well!*" observed Nonie, in a disjointed, bewildered fashion that brought a smile to Betty's lips.

"Of course I sha'n't say a word to Jack about this until he gets Mr. Erveng's letter," Betty said briskly. "Even then I sha'n't tell him anybody considers him a genius. I 'm not afraid he would get conceited," she hastened to explain, "but he *would* be embarrassed and feel foolish —"

A knock at the door interrupted her, and Hannah came forward with a little sheepish smile at Nora and me. "Please, Miss Betty, Mr. Rose would like all yez ladies to come down in the study."

"'To hear — is to obey!'" sang Betty, springing up from her chair. "Say to Mr. Rose, Hannah, that we will be with him with Mercury-like celerity."

Not for the world would Hannah have asked her mistress to repeat that message, though I knew that the last three words were an unknown tongue to her. "Say that we will be down right away," I said, fearful of what curious interpretation of it she might carry to papa.

"But wait a minute — do!" begged Kathie. "Why not settle the question of the housekeeping now? Hilliard will

be on in a week or two, and he will expect to have an answer. I *know* I can take charge here, if Betty will only let me. Don't *you* think I could, Nan? Really, I am not a bit too young — I 'm sure Hill would be on my side. Do tell her, Nan."

"Of course you could do it. I see no objection whatever," Nora answered in my stead. But the two girls still looked inquiringly at me.

"Do you remember, Miss Elizabeth, how glad and happy you and I were the day I accepted your offer to take my place in the home?" I asked Betty; the recollection sent a thrill of love through my heart for this dearest younger sister. "Yes," I added, "I think Kathie could very well take charge for you."

Kathie gave a little crow of delight, and clapped her hands softly, while Betty flew over to me and hugged me. "You dear, *dear* thing, you! I see what you mean!" she declared.

She straightened up, and going swiftly to Kathie — Betty's decisions are quickly made — she took our little sister's sweet face between her two hands and kissed her warmly. "You are a dear child to offer this," she said very tenderly. "We will wait until you are sixteen, Kathie, — that will be in April, you know, —and then, if Hill still wants me, why, I 'll not say him nay. Will that content you?" Then to us, with a merry laugh, though her eyes were most suspiciously moist: "If Hannah delivered my message correctly, papa will think that instead of by Mercury we are coming by way of old halting Vulcan. Let 's hurry, girls; I think he wants to talk to us about the Christmas doings. Oh! how perfectly *splendid* that we shall all be together again! Could you dignified married females and venerable mammas condescend to a race to the study door? One — two — three — away!" She threw an arm around Nora's waist and drew her, half resisting, lightly down the stairs.

But Betty loitered behind as we neared the study door, and slipped her hand through my arm. "I 'm going to write to Alice to-night," she whispered, "to tell her Fee will be home for Christmas. I think she ought to know before she gets here, don't you?"

XXI.

A ROYAL GIFT.

TOLD BY NANNIE.

EARLY on the morning of the 23d, Max and I received a telegram from Sandy Hook that the steamer Fee was on was coming up the bay. Nora and Chad had been notified too; and though Nonie is n't fond of early rising, we found them both at the house when we got there.

"Phil has come!" announced Jack, as he let us into the hall. "He arrived late last night, and just as soon as we got the telegram this morning, off he started to meet Fee. He looks fine —"

"His mustache is *ever* so much bigger than papa's!" put in Mädel, who, with Paul and Alan, had rushed to meet us.

"That 's the *third* time she 's said that this morning!" asserted Judge, who did not look very amiable. "Girls do harp on such trifles! Did you expect Phil's mustache would always have only the 'nine hairs' it started with?" Then, having administered this snub to his twin, he proceeded to air his own grievance. "Alan and I want to go down to the dock to meet Fee — and see the steamer — and now papa says '*No!*'" He gave the base of the newel post a vigorous kick. "Say, Nan, speak to him about it, won't you? We would n't get into one bit of harm, and I've never seen an ocean steamer come in. We ought to start right away. Say, will you, Nan?" this very persuasively, and sidling up to me.

"Oh, yes, Nan, *do* ask him," chimed in Alan, approaching me on the other side.

"Now just stop bothering Nannie," remarked Jack, decidedly. "You know very well when father says 'no,' as he did this morning, that that settles the question once for all." Within the last year, since his admission to college, Jack has taken to calling papa "father," as the older boys do, and I love to hear him say it, in that old-fashioned way of his. "Take off your overcoat, Max, and you and Nannie go right into the drawing room, — Betty and Nora are there." He unceremoniously pushed the two younger boys aside, and started to open the drawing-room door for me.

"A-c-h! you think you're awfully smart, don't you?" cried Alan, indignantly; while Judge had recourse to sarcasm. "Dear little Lark! Isn't it a *beautiful* bird! See it flap its wings!" he exclaimed; and getting close behind Jack, he began shaking his elbows and making a peculiar noise between his teeth, which by a great stretch of imagination was supposed to be an imitation of the lark's call. Since the discovery of Jack's story, "The Passing of our Little Brother the Lark," Judge has indulged in this mode of teasing his older brother.

The colour came into Jack's face, — he is still sensitive to Paul's teasing, — but he took no notice of his tormentor, who kept up his performance regardless of my earnest: "Judge, dear, do stop that disagreeable noise," until Max said with a surprised glance, "Why, I thought you had outgrown all that nonsense!"

That subdued the young man, and we all crowded into the drawing-room together, where Betty sprang to meet us with a warm welcome. "Oh, my dear," she exclaimed in an undertone, "such an excitement! The telegraph boy made a great commotion, ringing the bell until he got some one up, and that roused everybody; and, *of course*, every living member of the family wanted to go down to the dock to meet Fee. Well, papa put a stop to *that*. Some got indignant, and some others had their feelings hurt." She arched

her eyebrows with a swift glance at Judge and Kathie. "But it was no use, — the fiat had gone forth, — only Phil should go down and meet Fee and bring him home. We all know the fixity of the law of the Medes and Persians is nothing compared to papa's decrees; so the family had to simmer down — "

"Papa told Max last night of his wish, and he was to have gone to meet Fee if Phil had not got here in time," I said, as Betty stopped abruptly.

"Yes, I know — Phil told me this morning," she answered. "And we 've been waiting for the last two hours for Phil and Felix to appear. Papa has had me wait breakfast for them. But it 's getting late; the children — in fact, everybody is almost starved. Had n't you better suggest breakfast, Nan, before any one faints? I fancy Nonie wishes she had n't made a heroic effort at early rising — and *do* look at Chad!"

Nora was lounging gracefully in an easy-chair, but she looked cross; she kept yawning, and barely condescended to notice my dear husband, who, out of the kindness of his heart, was trying to chat with her. Near them, comfortably ensconced on a lounge, sat Chad, with a dreadfully bored expression on his face; his yellow head had fallen back against the wall, his eyes were closed, — he was asleep. Papa was walking restlessly up and down the room, with bent head, his hands behind his back.

Just then Judge slipped inside the drawing-room door; his jaws were moving, and with a surreptitious movement he held up a crisp, brown-topped bread roll — the kind that Cook is famous for — out of which a huge bite had been taken.

"*Had* to!" he declared, in answer to Betty's look of quick surprise, "to sustain fainting nature;" and he rolled his eyes at us. With an air of gusto he raised the biscuit to his lips, but it never reached them, for at that moment Alan's hand came over Paul's shoulder, and the expected morsel disap-

peared down *his* throat. There was an exclamation, not loud, on account of papa's presence, but decidedly deep; and then two boys fell on the stairs and rolled and squirmed and chuckled in a silent wrestle.

"There 's a whole panful of those rolls in the oven, keeping warm — for breakfast," Jack remarked longingly.

"Those boys will devour every one before anybody else has a chance to even smell them, if we don't get to the table pretty soon," declared Betty, in a tone of despair. "Nan, do speak to papa about it." So I went.

"Papa," I said, "don't you think we might have — "

"Ah, Nannie, my dear!" he said, looking up. He took my hand and drew it through his arm, and turned to resume his walk. "It has been a long two years — "

A carriage rattled along the street; the front door went open with a resounding bang, and as everybody made a simultaneous rush for the hall, a glad cry rang out through the house, "Here he is! Oh! here he is! Fee has come!"

When papa and I reached the hall — somehow we were the last — Phil was closing the front door; and a few feet from him, smiling at us, stood our beloved Felix!

In one glance I noticed that he was looking better than I had ever seen him, — fuller in the face, bright-eyed, brown; and the heavy travelling-ulster he wore increased the impression that he had grown stouter. Of course everybody talked at once, — there was a perfect babel of voices! — and of course everybody flocked around him. But there was a lull, and the little crowd divided to make way for papa, as he and Fee advanced to each other.

Phil has always declared that Fee was papa's favourite child; and since this morning we agree with him, for, to our intense surprise, instead of the strong hand-clasp which we, and I think Fee, expected, papa put his arms right round Felix, and *kissed* him! Just for a minute they clung to each other, then papa straightened up, and we heard him say, his

voice was shaking with feeling, "My son! welcome home!" I know Fee was surprised and touched.

My turn came next. Looking eagerly about him, Felix called out, "Where 's Nannie? Where is my twinnie?"

"'My Eurydice! I 've lost my Eurydice!'" chimed in Phil.

You may be sure it did not take me long to get to my twin; and with his arms round me, his dear voice in my ears, such a sense of thankfulness to God for all His goodness came over me that I put my head down on Fee's shoulder and cried. I know Fee understood, for he held me closer, and patted my shoulder and smoothed my hair with the tenderest touch, but the others cried out — I don't blame them; they wanted their turn! — "No tears; no tears to-day!" "Oh, goodness! Kathie is weeping, too!" "Cheer up, Nan!"

Max drew me gently to his side, and while I dried my tears the rest of the family crowded around Felix with loving welcome.

What a merry breakfast-party that was! what a happy day throughout! And how rapidly one pleasant happening succeeded another! Fee, of course, was the guest of honour, some one or other was ready and anxious to anticipate his every want, to wait on him; and he was not allowed to move without a retinue. How we all talked! There was so much to hear and to tell. The question asked and barely answered before succeeded with another; the stories begun and left unfinished to begin another, or to hear somebody else's story; the little tender pause over the sad parts; when Fee's arm went round Nonie, and her head was pressed on his shoulder; the bated breath with which we heard of the suspense of those weeks before Dr. Vlankoop admitted there was hope for Felix; the proud interest with which we listened to Phil's account of his business success in Chicago, and the happy thrill at my heart when I put my beautiful baby into Fee's arms, — how can I tell it all!

It was late in the afternoon before I got a little quiet talk with Felix. We had all — with the exception of Chad and Max, who had not yet come in — gathered in the school-room before dinner, after our old fashion ; sitting or lounging about, and all as near to Felix as our furniture would allow. The curtains were drawn ; and a bright fire blazed and crackled in the grate, throwing out a cheerful glow. It lighted up the long room, and cast grotesque shadows on the ceiling and into the far corners, investing Fee's yellow old plaster figures with the dignity of statuary, and falling with a softening effect on our battered, "tin-panny" piano and dilapidated book-shelves, that still swayed to and fro at a touch, on the heavy, plain old table round which we have all sat, on the big, shabby, chintz-covered sofa, with its deep flounce that makes a hiding-place for Jack's childish treasures, and on the venerable "charger," whose tail has long been a thing of the past. The chairs were old, some infirm, mostly outcasts from the drawing-room and other parts of the house ; the rug was faded and threadbare, so were the curtains, — an old, shabby, bare room, perhaps, yet there was not one of us but was glad to be in it that afternoon.

"It 's good to be here again," Fee said, settling himself comfortably in his rocker, after a loving glance about the old, familiar place.

"Yes," answered Phil ; he tilted his chair back, with his hands clasped behind his head, to get a good view of "Miss Chuno," as Judge used to call the old plaster Juno when he was a little fellow. "Many an evening I thought of this old room when I first went to Chicago, and longed to be back in it. Tell you ! those were 'tough' times," he went on reflectively, — "those long, deadly dull evenings — before I made some nice acquaintances." Then, as he glanced up and met the question in Fee's eyes, he added with a reassuring smile : "That 's all right, old man, — I did n't forget my promise of long ago. I think I may say,

with my usual modesty, that I've come out O. K., — no thanks to myself, though — " He paused abruptly, and tilting his chair again, looked round the room.

" We know you of old, Lion-heart ! " Fee said, with a thrill in his voice, and his eyes a-shine.

Nora leaned forward, and under cover of picking a thread off Phil's coat, she gave his arm a loving pat. " We *have* had some good times in this old room, haven't we? " she remarked graciously. " Do you know," with a glance that included us all, and the air of making a great concession, " I am beginning to think it is rather nice to belong to a large family — "

" What? In spite of the three Misses Rose? " broke in Betty.

" Better late than never, Nonie ; there 's hope for you yet," encouraged Phil ; adding, before she could reply : " Nan, will you *ever* forget the night we undertook to render that Greek play that Fee made up? Nora was to be the captive maiden at my chariot wheel, and at the last minute she flatly refused to fill the rôle, because Fee insisted she *must* rub white flour all over her hair to make it look very blond. Do you remember? *Was n't* Fee raving ! Then, when I tried to reduce Miss Nora to order by force of arms, she raced downstairs to Miss Marston, yelling as if brigands were after her. D' ye mind that, young 'ooman? " pulling a stray lock of Mrs. Whitcombe's hair ; which attention, as it was from Phil, she accepted in very good part. " 'T was the same night," continued Phil, " that Betty cut Jack's hair short, to make him look like a Roman soldier, and in the excitement of the moment snipped a piece out of his ear. How he did roar ! "

" You 'd have roared, too, had she done it to you," asserted Jack, though he joined in the general laugh. " There is a little V in the edge of my ear now, where she took the piece out." As he spoke, he fingered the injured member.

Then we began to "reminisce." Each one of the family, even to Alan, had some funny story of "old times" to tell, beginning, "Oh, do you remember?" or "Will you ever forget?" and there was much fun and laughter.

In the midst of the enjoyment I saw Jack take a surreptitious look at his watch; he and Betty did some signalling to each other; then they both slipped out of the room. By and by Phil got up, and looked at *his* watch.

"Guess I've time to run round to the Van Burens' before dinner," he said. "They might think it queer if I did n't — "

"Why, do they know that you are here?" Nora and I asked in the same breath.

"Well — Helen knows," Phil answered with a little hesitation. "Eh — I hear from her sometimes."

"Oh!" remarked Nora, significantly.

"There 's no oh! nor ah! about it." Phil's tone was a little short. "I've known Helen Vassah since we were chicks together; it 's a pity if we can't write to each other now and then."

"Don't get excited, dear," Nonie said sweetly, rising from her chair. "If you are going downstairs I'll go along and see if Chad has come, then we must leave for home. But don't forget, Phil, that papa still expects people to be punctual at meals."

"Well, I 'm off — I sha'n't be long. Ta-ta!" Phil waved his fingers to us, Nora slipped her hand into his arm, and they went out of the room in the most amiable fashion, followed by Kathie and Mädel.

Judge and Alan stayed awhile longer, then they, too, took themselves off and Fee and I were left alone. We drew our chairs close to each other then, and had our talk. Such a dear, confidential talk! But only at the end of it did we touch on the subject which was uppermost in both our minds.



"I am in better health than I ever expected to be," Fee said. "As you have seen to-day, I can walk without support, though Vlankoop advised that I should use a cane on the streets, so as not to overtire. That eternal old backache is a thing of the past, and I think I feel enough confidence in myself now to go up and down town alone. And that brings me to the question of my business prospects." He paused and looked thoughtfully into the fire; and I quietly waited for the rest.

Presently Fee roused up. "Max encourages me to think I can pick up some of the threads dropped two years ago," he remarked, "and perhaps work up a good business in time. I have n't been wasting the hours over there in Germany; besides improving my knowledge of the language, I 've read law a good deal, so as not to get rusty. And really, I feel much more competent now to undertake a case than when I began, a couple of years ago. I think I may be able to get an office in the building with Max, and I hope I shall get plenty to do; I want to work hard, to make up for lost time. I shall begin right after the holidays, — no more loafing about the house for me, — I 've had to do a lot of it, but I am in hopes all that is over. Now, Nan, there is something I 'm going to do," he spoke slowly. "I am sure the *pater* will approve, and I want only Max and you, besides, to know anything of it. I feel it is through God's mercy that my health is improved, — I want to show Him my gratitude in something more than words. And after thinking the matter over seriously, I have resolved to give half of my time to the poor" — Fee's face flushed, the eyes which looked into mine were very earnest — "I mean, all my life, please God! to devote one-half of my time to trying to right the wrongs of the poor — you know, Nan, to attend to the law affairs of the poor — without any charge. That will be my thank-offering, and I shall honestly give of my very best."

I could hardly wait for him to finish. "Indeed, I *know* you will, dear heart," I cried eagerly. "Oh, Fee, that will be a beautiful, holy work, — I 'm *so* glad you thought of it, for — don't you remember? — 'the cry of the poor is ever in the ear of the Lord.' It is just like you to think of it!" I caught his dear face between my two hands and kissed his lips and forehead. "Oh, twinnie!" I said brokenly, "God knows that I am grateful, with all my soul, for your recovery, — we all are."

Felix smiled, — that sweet, bright smile that lights up his whole face. "When the treatment was almost more than I could endure, there were two things that kept up my courage, — one was the knowledge of your love," he whispered. "I knew all you dear ones were praying for me over here —" He held my hand clasped tight in his, and for a few minutes we sat in silence, gazing into the fire.

He had n't said what else besides my love had sustained his courage, but I thought I knew; and that reminded me there was something I wanted to say to him. At any moment we might be interrupted, so presently I began: "You know that Alice is coming to spend Christmas with us here?"

"I heard it to-day," he answered quietly; then, after a silence, he added slowly, — there was a great sadness in his voice, and he looked away from me into the glowing coals, — "I am stronger, Nan, and I am truly grateful for it; but, after all, circumstances are not changed, — I am still, I always will be — a cripple."

I turned impulsively on him. "Felix, dear twin," I said, earnestly, "there is such a thing as being over-sensitive; *don't*, through that, wreck the happiness of two lives —"

He interrupted me, sitting up straight, alert, eager. "How do you know that she — ?" he began breathlessly.

But there was no time to finish the sentence. There was a rush of many feet up the attic stairs. "Nan! Felix! are



you in there? Alice has come — here she is!" Betty called out.

The family had escorted her up, and with merry chatter and laughter the party came trooping into the school-room.

"You two good people still gossiping in the firelight?" cried Nora, gaily. "Here I am again, Nan, and Chad, too — by the way, Max is in the study — papa insists we shall stay to dinner. And I could n't resist, now that this dear Boston girl has come. Do some one light the gas, so the new arrivals can see each other."

"Please don't light the gas for me," remonstrated Alice, in her sweet, clear voice. "I love the firelight."

But Nora would have her way; and in the little bustle that ensued — finding matches and reaching up to the high, old-fashioned gas-fixture — Alice and Felix shook hands.

With the light I saw that Fee had grown pale; and for the rest of the evening he was very quiet, pleading fatigue when Phil rallied him on it. But Alice appeared in good spirits. She looked, as Betty said, "lovelier and more noble than ever," and the frank, pleasant, unconscious fashion in which she treated Phil and Felix alike made my heart sink.

And what Betty had to tell me the next evening when Max, Son, and I got to the house, did not make me any more comfortable, though I tried to put away the feeling, for it was Christmas Eve, and we all had much reason to be glad of heart.

There was great excitement in the old home, and a delightful air of mystery.

"Oh, Nan! — everybody 's got a secret!" Mädel gleefully informed me, as she caught Max and me trying to smuggle in our bundles. "Even *papa* would n't let any one in the study this afternoon! You and Max and Phil and Fee are to dress the tree, and by and by — when we are all sound asleep, you know — Phil is to hang the presents on, and to put them round the foot of the tree. Everybody

is to take their" (she was too excited to have any regard for grammar) "own presents into the drawing-room and put them on the piano and the lounge. It 's to be all dark, so we sha'n't see any of the things that are there, or the tree; and Phil is n't to look at a single word that 's written on the packages. Oh! oh!" she danced on one foot, then on the other, and clapped her hands in ecstasy, "there 'll be stacks and stacks and *stacks* of presents! What d' you think? Jack has locked himself in his room to tie up and get his things ready, and Judge is doing his in the school-room closet — in the dark! Alan has his all ready — in a big bundle, which he 's so afraid somebody will open by mistake that he is carrying it all over the house with him. Miss Marston won't let a person put even a *nose* inside her door. And," drawing nearer, "did you see the way Nurse 'whipped off' Son?" She had caught that expression from nurse. "Well, *she* has bundles upon bundles in her room, and she just wanted to get back to it quickly to look after them. Nonie's things are in there, I 'm pretty sure, and Betty's — so we should n't see them, you know, and I *know* Kathie 's are there, too, 'cause she 's Nurse's pet. I 'm not so sure about Alice, though. Oh, I *wish* Christmas would come *lots* of times a year! and I wish to-morrow would come like a wink!" She paused breathless.

"Don't stop, Mädel; go right on," teased Max, giving one of her yellow curls a gentle pull.

"Keep our secret, dearie — don't let anybody know that you saw Max or me bring in any parcels," I urged.

"In*deed* I won't, Nan — and I did n't really *see* what you 've got — so I could n't tell — could I? Oh, I wish to-morrow were here, — I know it 'll be lovely!" and she danced away in high spirits.

The next person we ran against was Betty.

"Oh, dear! this is dreadful! Where *shall* I put these bundles before everybody sees them?" I exclaimed in despair.



"Let Max take them to the study, — that is the safest place, and I don't think papa will object to letting ***him*** in," advised Betty, promptly. "And, Nan, come over in this corner with me, — I want to tell you something — "

"I know — Hill has arrived," I said, smiling at her earnest face.

A swift, happy smile chased the grave expression away. "Yes; he came this afternoon," she said, the colour showing in her cheeks. "You will see him to-night, and he 'll spend the day here to-morrow. He is just the *dearest* fellow, Nan! I wonder sometimes how I ever could have made fun of him and been so disagreeable. Do you know," with an ingenuousness that was equal to any of Jack's, "he is just the sort of man I *like*, — he is so sensible and so — — well, *solid* — when Hill says a thing he means it down to his very toes. There is n't a particle of the butterfly about him, is there? I 'm so glad of that."

Hilliard Erveng — old sobersides — a butterfly! I could have laughed aloud, but I did n't, with Betty's tender eyes before me, and the sweet, shy droop of her lips.

"No, Miss Elizabeth, he is not frivolous," I assured her.

"But this is what I wanted to tell you," went on Betty, dropping her voice to a whisper. "My *dear*," most impressively, "I 'm afraid that our hopes in a certain quarter are all doomed to disappointment, — I am afraid Alice has *quite* changed toward — Fee! Oh, she is nice and pleasant, and all that; but she treats Fee just *exactly* as she does Phil, and we all know she does n't care a rap for Phil, in the way of loving him, you know. And ever since she came Fee has frozen right up, — 'crawled into his shell,' as Phil puts it, — he scarcely opens his mouth unless it is to papa. He simply *won't* make the slightest exertion to be agreeable. I could shake him! How is Alice *ever* to know he cares for her if he does n't show it? Fee is a dear fellow, and he is clever, and just as good as gold; but really, Nan, though

I would n't say it to anybody but you, sometimes he *is* a crank."

"Even so he is lovable," I declared stoutly; "don't you remember how dear mamma qualified it? — she used to call him her '*lovable* crank.' Don't be hard on him, Betty," I pleaded. "I can't stand anything being said against Fee. Which of us, do you think, could have gone through all those years of suffering and come out as brave and unselfish as he? Do you remember what the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table says? — 'A crank is something on which other things turn.' Fee has been the crank that has turned us out many an example of fortitude and cheerful endurance —" I had to stop.

"Why, Nan! don't take it so seriously!" cried Betty, eagerly. "Why, you dear thing! I think Fee is perfectly *splendid*, and I could n't begin to tell you how I have missed him in the house. He is such a comfort — next to you. But really, Nan, it 's awfully provoking to see things going as they are now, when —"

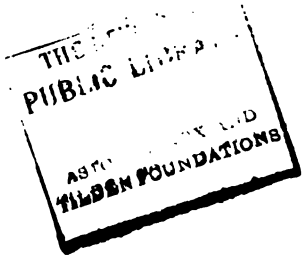
"Betty! Betty! where are those ornaments for the tree?" called Phil from the floor above. "That you, Nancy Lee? Just in time to make yourself useful. Come up here."

That was a busy, jolly evening, — dressing the drawing-room with Christmas greens and wreaths, hanging the tiny bunch of real English mistletoe enwrapped in smilax on the large old gilt gas-fixture, trimming the tree behind locked doors, and then, after the impromptu supper in the dining-room and when the lights were at last put out, the long line of figures that stole with snickers and chuckles and half-subdued merriment into the dark drawing-room, one after the other, and deposited armfuls of bundles of all shapes, sizes, and description. Alice was in the best of spirits, flitting here, there, everywhere, and I noticed, as Betty had, that she seemed to laugh and talk as freely with Felix as with Phil, — meeting Fee's grave eyes in apparently a most frank



"Alice turned and faced Fee."




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and unconcerned fashion; while Fee — well, I sha'n't tell all that his manner told me, but in the midst of the merriment my heart grew heavy for what might be before him.

Well, as I said, that was a jolly evening; and Christmas Day was full of happiness. Among the many gifts exchanged that day was one which transcends all others, — the royal gift of Love! — but, as Jack would say, you 'll hear about that afterward.

The children were up bright and early on Christmas morning, and after that there was no sleep for any one, for they went from door to door through the house — "those daring youngsters!" Betty declared, "*we* were never allowed to do any such thing" — singing Christmas carols, — at least Kathie and Mädel sung lustily, Alan and Judge half-heartedly with a strong fear that they were "making fools of themselves." After that, breakfast, with such hilarity as no previous Christmas breakfast in the family annals could boast of. Then a gathering in the school-room to examine the contents of the stockings which had been hung there for the smaller gifts of Santa Claus's bestowing. Everybody had a stocking, — Chad, and my dear husband, and even papa. And it was no small part of my enjoyment to see how much pleasure Nonie still took in our simple "old-time" custom. Later came the beautiful Christmas service, when we all, a party of sixteen! walked up the aisle of the old church where we have worshipped for so many Christmases, and filled nearly three pews. There was a prayer of thanksgiving offered up that morning for "safety, through the perils of the great deep," and for "a deliverance from bodily sickness!" I slipped my hand into Fee's, as we knelt side by side, and he held it in a close, firm clasp, — words were almost inadequate to express our feelings; but God reads the heart, — He knew.

It was right after that that I caught sight of Alice's face — !

That was indeed a happy day!

As the Christmas-tree was for my boy's benefit, it was shown in the afternoon, so as not to interfere with his bed-time. Murray and Hope Unsworth came round to help us enjoy it, and Helen Vassah. The little air of good understanding between Helen and Phil gave me a new idea in that direction, and filled Nora with the deepest interest. Helen is a pretty little thing, quiet, and rather shy of manner; but she has a good deal of character under that demure exterior, — she is nice, and we are all fond of her. And Phil has been so brave and manly over his disappointment of Alice that he deserves to be happy, — I could see that he felt the first meeting with her; but that passed off. Phil is a fine fellow; these two years have strengthened his principles; he has grown less rough, less fond of teasing, — more of a man. Dear Phil! He is our elder brother, but, somehow, until this visit I had scarcely realised that.

Scaramouche Richmond also came to our Christmas-tree, and Siegfried and Marguerite, and Donald and Karl, — they were spending their holidays at the "mansion," — so we had quite a drawing-room full. Hilliard was with us, too, — his strong, serious face softening into tenderness as his eyes followed Betty's slender, graceful figure and piquante face about the room.

The shades were drawn, the lights turned up; every taper on the tree flashed into a twinkling star, and made of our *Weihnacht-baum* a radiant, dazzling thing of beauty. Then everybody was admitted, and, holding hands, we all — Alice coaxed papa into it, and my son sat up in his father's arms, laughing and crowing — we all danced round the tree and sang our carols! Then came the grand distribution of presents! when everybody was surprised and delighted; when ohs! and ahs! and thank yous! fell fast, and "thick as leaves in Vallombrosa;" when hugs were exchanged, and kisses; when all talked as loud and as fast as they pleased, —

in fact, a royal time of enjoyment. Then, when the tree had been viewed from every point and been thoroughly enjoyed, there was dancing, — such headlong galops and waltzes, lancers, and quadrilles where people made mistakes "just for fun;" and a long, many-coupled Virginia Reel, which Son danced, borne aloft on his uncle Phil's broad shoulders, and clutching at his relatives and friends with shouts of glee as he went through the long arch.

But after a while a few of us older ones drifted up to the old school-room, — and so it was that Alice and I found ourselves sitting there before the fire.

Presently, when we had chatted awhile, she said: "Nan, I want to talk something over with you —"

Just then the door opened and Felix came in. "Twinnie! — is that Betty with you?" he asked, as he came along, peering at us in that near-sighted way of his.

Then he saw who it was, and hesitated; but I said quickly, "Come in, Fee, and sit here with us, — it's so quiet and cosey." I was afraid he would go away, but instead he came forward and sat down by me — opposite to Alice. And we sat and chatted, at least Alice and I did; she grew quite merry, but Felix said very little.

A disturbance outside the school-room door attracted my notice; it grew. I heard Betty's voice, then Judge's. There must not be a quarrel on Christmas Day. I got up to go to them, and as I went by her Alice caught my hand.

"Come back, Nannie, — right away," she said hurriedly; to my surprise, her fingers were icy-cold.

Outside the school-room I found Betty, her back against the door, — I had to push hard to get out, — determination in her voice and mien.

"I had to do it, to keep him out," she declared. "He is the most inquisitive boy — !"

"Why *should n't* I go in?" demanded Paul. "It's my school-room as much as yours. I'd like to know what

business you have to keep me out." He made a dive for the door, but Betty was too quick for him.

"He will just spoil *every*thing!" she said to me in a hurried whisper. "He sha'n't get in."

"Why don't you go down in the drawing-room, Judge, and join in the fun?" I suggested.

"First, I want to go in and warm my hands by the schoolroom fire," he said, with that slow, impudent smile that *is* so infectious; "then I 'll skip off down-stairs."

"He thinks something may be going on in there, and he is determined to see it," remarked Betty, in an exasperated tone.

"Nothing is going on, Judge," I assured him. "Only Alice, Fee, and I are having a little talk. It would n't interest you, and I would rather you did n't come in. Go downstairs like a dear, good boy, won't you?" I laid my hand coaxingly on his arm.

Judge twisted his shoulders impatiently. "Can I tell Nurse *you* say I 'm to have a handful of raisins and almonds?" he asked crossly.

"Yes, you may," I agreed at once.

"All right, then I 'll go," he announced; turning to Betty with a grimace, he added, "But I 'm not doing it for *you*, miss, and you need n't think it;" then he took hold of the banisters and started down the stairs, three steps at a time.

"Oh, Nan, how I wish I had your way with the boys!" sighed Betty. "If *I* had offered him the moon, he would n't have gone, — Judge is a very obstinate boy! Are they making friends in there? Oh, I *wish* —" She stopped, but her wistful tone told me all she left unsaid. "I think I 'll disappear too," and with a smile she ran downstairs. Then I went back to those two by the fire.

"No, papa's health is not so good as it was when we came back from Europe," Alice was saying, when I came in and



took my chair. She spoke in a changed — constrained — voice, and gave me a grateful glance as I passed her. "That was what I was going to tell you, Nannie," she continued. "We are considering where to spend the winter, and the decision is left to me. Mamma is in favour of California, papa of Italy; and I am to settle which it shall be —" She paused. "Papa is fond of Florence," she said presently. "If we go, it will probably end in our staying there for a long time — years perhaps."

"Which — which — will you decide on?" Fee's voice was unsteady and hoarse. He was sitting on the arm of the old sofa now.

There was a silence of a minute or two — a coal fell on the fender, my heart thumped, then Alice answered slowly, "I think — now — it will be — Florence." The pretty colour had faded out of her cheeks; and with the last word she suddenly looked straight up at Felix, — her eyes were big and dark, the pupils dilated.

What she saw in his face I don't know, but she rose hurriedly from her chair, and took some steps toward the door — in a blind, groping fashion, very unlike Alice.

But before she had gone far there came a low call, — "Alice! *Alice!*"

Oh, how it brought back to my recollection that awful night of the fire!

With one hand on the back of a chair, Alice turned and faced Fee. How noble she looked!

His face was very sad; when he spoke his voice was shaking, though I knew he was making a great effort to control it. "I am still a cripple, Alice, — a poor, weak creature, — not worthy of you in *any* way. I know this only too well — and I have tried —" His voice broke; longingly his arms reached out to her. "Dear," he cried out — oh, the inexpressible love in that one word! — "come to me!"

And, swift as a bird to its nest, she went, with a sweet, glad cry, nestling close to his breast, as his eager, tender arms held her fast.

They had entirely forgotten me. Rising softly, I went out and closed the door, leaving them alone to their happiness.



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